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SEFT Events

A *Screen Readers' Day Meeting*, to discuss the four numbers of volume 19, will be held in April 1979. Details in the next issue of *Screen*.

A Weekend School, *Documentary and Politics: the 1930s*, will be held on December 1 and 2 1978. The school will examine the attempts of two schools of documentary filmmakers working in Britain in the 1930s to use film as a means of cultural and political education. Details from SEFT.

An Easter School, *Teaching About Television*, will be held on April 9-12 1979. The school will introduce the main issues in recent theoretical work on television and examine pedagogic possibilities. Details from SEFT.

SCREEN EDUCATION

Number 27 Summer 1978

Gillian Dyer: TV interviews. Bob Ferguson/Armand Matelart: *Sesame Street*. Jill Forbes: French Cinema in education. Kevin Rockett: Irish Film Culture. Chris Rodrigues: Independent film-making and education. Anthony Easthope: Film anthologies.

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Richard Nice/Annette Kuhn: Bourdieu. Philip Simpson: Gramsci. Dick Hedbigge and Geoff Hurd: Reading and Realism. John Tagg: The Currency of the Photograph. John Corner and Sylvia Harvey: Communication Studies. Jill Forbes: May '68.

Subscriptions and prices: see page 144.

The *Screen* Editorial Board welcomes manuscripts and proposals for articles from contributors. It is very helpful if manuscripts are typed double spaced with wide margins and are suitable for photocopying. Manuscripts will be acknowledged on receipt, submitted to the Board for its consideration and the Board's decision conveyed to the writer.

Editorial

This year has seen government proposals which if implemented will radically affect the structures of the film and broadcasting industries in Britain for the foreseeable future, and thus in turn the context and possibilities for the work of *Screen* and SEFT. The proposed establishment of a British Film Authority presents an opportunity to argue for a re-structuring of the economic basis of the industry and two organisations in particular – the Association of Independent Producers and the Independent Film-makers' Association – have made submissions on behalf of groupings of independent film-makers in response to the white papers. The article by John Ellis in this issue defines something of the terms of the debate sustained by those submissions, situating historically the discursive emergence and construction of the notion of 'art cinema' – a notion that is strategically determining today in the different representations of the AIP and the IFA.

Independent cinema and its representation is also in question in the pieces by Janet Bergstrom and Constance Penley, both of whom are members of the California-based *Camera Obscura* collective. Bergstrom and Penley are concerned to review the current terms of the critical-historical account and definition of the avant-garde, in order at once to clarify the effects of the limiting assumptions of that defining account and equally to prepare for the argument of an alternative position deriving from and engaging the problems raised for and by them in their work to develop feminist film theory. At the close of her piece, Bergstrom thus raises a number of issues – around problems of discursive organisation, enunciation, positionality – that cut quite directly across *Screen's* own project of work.

These issues are then central too in the article by Stephen Heath which continues that work by examining questions of representation and sexual difference, attempting to understand how the latter is produced in representation and representing relations and how cinema and film are maintained in that production round the fixed – 'visible' – difference of the woman. Alternative practices

- 8 are argued in terms of the necessity for a representation 'held to use', against representing, against universalising conditions of exchange, the indifference founded on the constant assurance of *the* difference, the relations of men and women in that representing, by existing patriarchal order.

Lastly, Colin MacCabe, reviewing recent BFI monographs on aspects of television, points to the need for work on the 'specificity and effectivity' of television within its practices and structures and Ian Connell, reviewing a recent SEFT weekend school on 'Ideology/discourse/institution', poses questions of the determination of readings and of the effectivity of texts, of the reception of films and television programmes.

MARK NASH

Art, Culture and Quality Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and Seventies

John Ellis

Over two years ago, a report in *Screen* examined the movement to reform the British film industry, whose commercial entertainment sector had been in decline since the beginning of the decade. Since that discussion (*Screen* v17 n1, Spring 1976) on the proposals for reform contained in the original White Paper (known as the Terry Report)* a new situation has arisen. An Interim Action Committee, chaired by Sir Harold Wilson, produced another White Paper** outlining a possible structure for a British Film Authority (BFA). This has had a less than rapturous reception, and the Department of Trade is now soliciting direct submissions on the basis of the two White Papers so that it can implement changes in the relation between the state and film production. The present situation is one in which some government action can be expected, regardless of the outcome of the next General Election. At present the idea of support for film as a cultural activity is gaining ground, and the definition of film as a 'cultural activity' is itself being disputed. Finally, independent cinema, through the Independent Film-makers' Association (IFA), is making a strong initiative for increased recognition and financial provision by the state.

This article addresses these developments. The first part attempts to provide an examination of the forces at work in the present situation, the second is concerned with the delineation of

* Report of the Prime Minister's Working Party *Future of the British Film Industry*, presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister, January 1976 (HMSO Cmnd 6372).

** Report of the Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry *Proposals for the setting up of a British Film Authority*, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Trade, January 1978 (HMSO Cmnd 7071).

- 10 the discourse of those film critics who used and promoted the conception of the 'quality British film' between 1942 and 1949. This is a contribution to the study of largely unexamined notions that figure both in the practice of cinema and in submissions to the Department of Trade: notions of 'art cinema', 'quality film', 'British cinema'.

I Great Expectations

'English film production . . . has been at the cross-roads for so long that it is in continual danger of dying there and being buried for a suicide, with a stake through its middle.'

Michael Powell, *Penguin Film Review* n1, London 1946, p 107.

There is the possibility for a decisive shift in government policy towards the cinema. Instead of the present division where the Department of Trade takes responsibility for 'film-as-commerce' and the Department of Education and Science for 'film-as-culture', a single ministerial responsibility for film has been proposed (Cmnd 7071, op cit). If this proposal is implemented in conjunction with other Labour Party proposals, the result could be the creation of a single Minister for the Arts with Cabinet status and a separate civil service department. Such a Minister would be responsible for the whole range of bodies dealing with film production: the Arts Council, with its own film panels and its support for Regional Arts Authorities (RAAs); the British Film Institute with its Production Board and contribution to RAAs; and the proposed British Film Authority. The possibility then exists for a comprehensive policy towards the cinema which will recognise definitively that its products are not straightforwardly commercial.

The crucial new body in this potential arrangement is the British Film Authority. According to the Interim Action Committee's proposals, it would have considerable funds: £20 million from public funds over four years; the income from a reconstituted Eady levy (on box office payments) at present up to £5 million a year; any residues from the operations of the National Film Finance Corporation which will be incorporated into the BFA; plus any income from other sources, for example the suggested levy on the television screenings of old feature films. The distribution of these funds is undecided, as is the internal structure of the Authority. The Interim Action Committee has suggested that the Authority should have a small permanent staff responsible to a voluntary central committee and that the formulation of specific policies should be left to separate committees drawn from each sector of 'the industry' (production, distribution, exhibition). In the first instance it is the Department of Trade's decision whether this structure should be implemented and how

power should be distributed within it. The Interim Action Committee, as its title suggests, expects to become the BFA central committee. Given the constitution of the Interim Action Committee this would mean that in all probability the present structure of film production will continue with state subsidy. There will be another attempt to produce large-scale British films aimed at the international box-office which the American majors effectively control, if only by virtue of their massive domestic market. There is, however, an increasing awareness outside these circles that film production finance has to be constituted along very different lines, and that where state finance is concerned, it should be directed towards developing cinema as a cultural activity rather than towards providing the stakes for a long-odds gamble on massive box-office success. Two very different arguments around this issue have emerged in submissions to the Department of Trade: One*, from the Association of Independent Producers (122 Wardour St, London W1), recommends the state underwriting of the production of 'indigenous British films'; the other,** from the Independent Film-makers' Association (12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2), recommends that the existing activities of independent cinema should be developed to create the basis for a new cinema. Both exploit a description of film as 'a cultural activity', but the uses that are made of this description and the aims that support them are very different. The purpose of what follows is not to provide a substitute for reading these documents, but rather to indicate the positions upon which they base their arguments.

The AIP recommends that the BFA should set up three funds (for 'first-time' features, for general features, for short films) which would develop an 'indigenous industry producing "British" films' (para 36). The funds would act as investors whose 'investments could take the form of direct capitalisation, or as guarantees against deficit, or as straight-forward subsidies or grants. Investment and deficit guarantees would operate at the pre-production stage. Subsidies or grants (merit awards) could operate also at post-production or even post-exhibition' (paras 63-4). The basic argument, therefore, is that the state should underwrite a film production that maintains existing commercial arrangements. The extent of this subsidy is indicated in a revealing footnote to the report itself: 'Whereas *A Taste of Honey*, an indigenous film, grossed £350,000 in the UK during April 1962 – three times its production cost – today the average UK distributors' gross [on

* *AIP Report*, Recommendation to the Government following the Prime Minister's Working Party report on the 'Future of the British Film Industry' and the Interim Action Committee's report on the setting up of a British Film Authority, London August 1978.

** Independent Filmmakers' Association, submission to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade on 'The Future of the British Film Industry', London 1 July 1978.

12 the EMI circuit – ABC cinemas] on an English speaking film (including blockbusters) is about £70,000. The cheapest commercial feature film cannot be made for much less than £200,000 – indeed the average is likely to be in excess of £½ million'. It is the AIP's hope that a certain number of the films they consider should be subsidised will be shown abroad, so that some of the subsidy could be paid back into the fund. According to the figures, the subsidy could be anything between £130,000 and £430,000 for a single feature film.

A basic material definition of cinema is given in the AIP proposals: 'whether light projected through moving celluloid is replaced by other technological means, the shared experience of going to a public place to sit with other members of the community in an auditorium with a large screen will remain' (para 23). Two unargued conceptual leaps are made from this. The first is that cinema in Britain today equals the declining commercial entertainment sector, dominated by the duopoly of Rank and EMI – the whole report is couched in terms of the existing commercial scale of financial operation and its arrangements of distribution and exhibition. The second conceptual leap is to define a certain specific variant of this 'shared experience' as being of 'quality' and 'cultural importance'. The AIP suggests that film production in Britain consists of three areas. The first is the 'subcontracted, service' industry, providing production facilities for films primarily directed towards 'the American marketplace'. Titles cited are: *Star Wars*, *The Omen*, *Superman*. Second, films made by British technicians and British-based companies and directors which are directed primarily towards the American and international market: *Murder on the Orient Express*, the Bond films and *Death on the Nile*. 'Such films are fairly infrequent' (para 7). These two areas do not deserve any state funding according to the AIP. It is the third area that the report is concerned with: 'the films which struggle to exist are those we would truly call British – *Kes*, *Family Life*, *If . . .*, *Charlie Bubbles*, *Gumshoe*, and more recently *Sailor's Return* and *Black Joy*' (para 7). To this list can be added 'the dollar financed . . . quintessentially British films, such as *Oliver*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Tom Jones*, *Alfie*, *Man for All Seasons*, *Georgy Girl*' (para 2). Such films, they argue, exemplify two inextricably linked qualities: they are 'British' and they are 'cultural'. The argument runs: 'there are clear and evident cultural and political benefits for a country when some of the films of quality available in its cinemas are home produced, national films about their own life and manners' (para 38). 'If the Government's involvement with film is to be based on cultural grounds, it follows that the use of tax-payers' money for investment in production will be justified if it helps support production within an indigenous industry, with subjects drawn from our cultural interests and requirements' (para 36). These

terms are being introduced to promote an area of film production which is more or less non-existent today, as the Report's list of films cited demonstrates. These terms are drawn from the discourse of 'art cinema' or 'specialised cinema' which seeks to designate an identifiable object, the 'quality film' which at once expresses certain spiritual or thematic characteristics of a nation-state, and provides a genuinely different experience from that offered by the normal run of cinema experiences. The terms 'national' and 'indigenous' and the term 'quality' are brought together in the term 'culture' with its overtones of both nationalism and bourgeois taste. The AIP report rests its case for the systematic state subsidy of what hitherto has been regarded as more or less a part of commercial film-making upon this discourse. It takes the terms of this discourse uncritically, just as it takes the terms of commercial feature film production and dissemination uncritically. 13

The IFA report *On 'The Future of the British Film Industry'* seeks to redefine these two central terms. It does so from the position of increasing strength of British independent cinema which is producing films and promoting fresh modes of their dissemination 'on the most minimal of funds' (para 15). The report argues that there exist two forms of cinema in Britain. The first is the 'mainstream popular entertainment cinema using well-tried narrative formulae' (para 4). It is 'predominantly intended either to provide experiences of a type that television cannot hope to emulate, or else to cater for a specific youth audience' (ibid). This type of cinema is the arena within which the AIP appears to operate. The IFA identifies a second form of cinema, an independent cinema which in Europe has historically concentrated upon 'smaller budget films of quality aimed at domestic and European markets' (para 5). It argues that the development of independent cinema has taken a decisively different course in Britain: 'a new generation of filmmakers in Britain began in the 1960s to adopt new practices outside the dominant structures and traditional conceptions because they had become aware that the monopolies which control the commercial industry and determine government film policy would never tolerate, let alone encourage, innovation and diversity; they were aware also that television, despite its benevolent and liberal façade, is in its own fashion just as closed and censorious as the commercial film industry' (para 15). The IFA report thus proposes a new conception of cinema: it is based on lower budgets than those of the commercial industry; production is based in regional film workshops 'using video and super-8 film as well as 16mm' (para 15) rather than being centralised and metropolitan; and exhibition takes place in conjunction with these film workshops as well as in specialised cinemas and screening venues at meetings and in educational institutions. The report argues that this conception of cinema is

- 14 now being developed as far as existing limited funding permits. Its case is that this work should receive sufficient state subsidy so that a new cinema could be developed. The argument hinges on two points: first, that this activity is taking place and is growing; the second, that it represents the emergence of cinema as a cultural activity.

I would now like to examine the notion of 'culture' that is being advanced in the IFA report, and which supports and justifies the argument for state subsidy. The report takes the terms 'artistic and cultural merit' and 'artistic and social significance' from the Terry Report as its basis. Having argued that a subsidised cinema should be established like the subsidised areas of other cultural activities (eg theatre and music), it begins to redefine these terms. It does so by giving the terms 'culture', 'art', 'subsidised cinema' a series of connotations which turn them away from their habitual destinations. They are contrasted with an unwillingness on the part of existing commercial cinema and television: an unwillingness to promote 'innovation and diversity' (para 15), and an unwillingness to provide 'a socially responsible valuation of cultural merit, and a long-term view of benefit to the community' (para 14). There are thought to be two benefits to the community that would come from a subsidised sector: the first is the provision of kinds of film that fall outside the dominant definitions of both commercial cinema and of television; the second is of the opening of the processes of film production themselves to interested groups through film workshops, and which forms a crucial part in developing a critical perspective on the dominant institutions. 'Culture' and 'art' are thus given the connotations of criticism, of innovation: subsidised cinema is thought of as fulfilling functions which are inconceivable within a commercial framework or within media which deal with a barely differentiated mass audience.

The terms 'culture' and 'art' are used by the IFA to bring the activities of independent cinema to the attention of those responsible for formulating the new government policy towards cinema. As a result of this there is now a possibility that state funding will include an arrangement for a continual subsidy of independent cinema both in the production and dissemination of films. The exact scale and arrangements are still far from decided, and cannot be decided until a series of political changes has taken place: a new government in power, the commitment to establish some kind of Minister for the Arts. In this context, two kinds of work on the nature of the discourse which the IFA is attempting to exploit and divert would be important. The first is the examination of the ways in which the funding of 'cultural activities' (music, theatre, dance, poetry, visual arts etc) are justified and carried out by the Arts Council and related bodies. It is clear that the IFA's attempt to exploit definitions calls upon

these conceptions in that it argues that 'the case for subsidising such a cinema is the same as that for theatre and music, both of which already receive considerable subsidies in this country, though less than in certain European countries' (para 13). Equally, the IFA is exploiting the particular way in which the notions of 'art' and 'culture' have been articulated within cinema. The AIP's report conversely provides an example of the straightforward use of a chauvinistic variant of these terms. 15

This article is concerned with the second area of work which the IFA's proposals opens up – the examination of the discourse which constitutes the 'art cinema' and the 'quality film'. It does not claim to be definitive: it looks at a crucial moment in the history of the British cinema to see how the film criticism of the time constituted an object 'the quality film', and how it conceived the role and possible dissemination of that object. The period of 1942-9 was one in which commercial production for the first time began to undertake a series of films which accorded with the critics' definition of 'quality'. The fate of these products lead to a disillusion with some of the conceptions that the critics had employed in connection with them. This work is offered as a contribution to the understanding of one of the discourses that the IFA is having to use in its attempt to argue for a state-subsidised material basis for the expanding activities of independent cinema.

II The Quality Film Adventure 1942-8: Preamble

The above section concerned itself with two distinct arguments which are currently being deployed to justify different kinds of state subventions of the cinema as a cultural activity. A series of terms is central to each argument: terms which are open to a certain process of redefinition (IFA project), or can be used simply as unexamined grounding points for economic arguments (AIP position). The terms themselves are at once familiar and bizarre, charged with meaning and strangely vacuous: 'quality film', 'national cinema', 'prestige', 'cultural activity', 'artistic merit', 'art cinema'. These terms are being mobilised to define and promote the space of definite forms of film work. At the same time they are unclear in their definition, part of 'what everyone understands', yet no-one is prepared to define. Such a situation is by no means novel. Theoretical work can, under the pressure of its own internal development and external imperatives, develop sophisticated conceptualisations of particular practices which are capable of furthering and, indeed, altering those practices. Yet the concepts produced in this work exist in the course of political practice alongside notions which are necessarily unexamined. The notions around 'art cinema' are examples of this process: regarded with suspicion, they are nevertheless used, tolerated, experienced. A definite object is constituted by these notions, by the discursive

16 system of which they are a part, an object that can be designated, that affects films written about, films seen and even some films made within the independent cinema. Yet though this object 'art cinema' is demonstrably present and active, it is scarcely *known* in any terms except those in which it proposes itself. Recent theoretical work has begun to construct a new form of thinking about cinema; recent work of independent cinema has proved to be unassimilable to the discourses of art cinema. This is a necessary first movement, whereby another discourse begins to produce and be produced within a new space of activity. Two discursive systems now co-exist uneasily, across numerous misunderstandings, appropriations of each other's terms and uneven development in different areas.

A politics which tries to exploit the terms of 'art cinema' is a new development. It is no longer enough to recognise that this object, constituted within a particular discourse, does exist and has definite (though not necessarily identified) effects. It is no longer a situation where some notion of the 'separate development' of practices and their discourses can take place. A politics is proposed whereby a new practice of cinema attempts to justify itself by taking up and redefining, turning aside, some terms from the discourse of an established practice. This is not the simple stop-gap process of using a sophisticated language of developed concepts when examining textual processes, only to fall back on simple notions of 'the audience' when discussing exhibition practices. This is an act of political calculation: state finance offers the only means of producing expansion of this sector; state financing 'knows' the discourses of art cinema, recognises it as an object, so independent cinema has to exploit this space in order to produce itself as a recognisable practice for state funding.

This is a situation in which the construction of the notion of art cinema has to be examined. The following analysis is offered as a contribution to this process. It is an examination of the way in which the conception of 'the quality film' was developed in journalistic film criticism during a particularly crucial period for British cinema: 1942-8. This period saw the development of a fairly strong movement within the entertainment feature industry to create a distinctively British quality film. The object 'quality film' was defined by the critics in opposition to the film executives' notion of 'prestige film', and was an area of production that virtually disappeared as a result of the stringent cut-backs imposed in 1948. This marks a kind of turning point: from 1948 onwards, 'quality film' was no longer demanded from the British (or, after the House Committee on Un-American Activities investigations, the American) film industry. Instead it was sought in the specialised cinemas which showed predominantly European films. The period is crucial, then, for these reasons: it is the point at which 'quality film' is a notion developed by a large number of jour-

nalistic critics; it seemed to them to have a real effect on the domestic film production; it was linked to a strategy in relation to industry and audience; the disintegration of the strategy led to the identification or possibly re-identification of 'quality film' with imported, predominantly European, films. 17

The notion of 'quality film' is one of the central notions in the discourse of art cinema. It is a term that is mobilised in the AIP proposals. This is not to say that the following analysis will reveal its precise definition now. The analysis is offered rather as both historical and exemplary: it shows the way in which at a particular time the notion of 'quality film' was constituted. It shows the way in which the 'quality film' is produced by a whole network of terms in a particular organisation. Some of these terms are given specific meaning only within this particular discourse, others (such as the particular version of humanism and nationalism) come from more generalised ideological practices. What qualifies this particular series of utterances of particular writers as 'a discourse' is the fact that it constitutes an object (the 'quality film') which can then be identified across particular practices. This discourse is neither perfectly stable nor totally exclusive: it draws upon terms constituted elsewhere so that it can base its particular organisation and production within a definite ideological universe, to the mutations of which it is thus subject. It is equally never in a state of absolute coherence and exhaustive exploration of all its terms. So the discourse which constitutes the quality film is subject to a particular form of humanism associated with the post-war radical movement that brought a Labour Government to power. It is a humanism that represents a belief in the progressive elevation of the hitherto deprived classes to the heights of bourgeois culture: an attitude neatly encapsulated in Ellen Wilkinson's desire, as Minister for Education, to create a 'Third Programme nation'. Such an elevation has a definite internationalist purpose, to create understanding and co-operation between the people of all nations. This stirring, middle-class optimism reached a predictable disillusion, and this disillusion certainly contributed to the revisions which the discourse of the 'quality film' underwent at the end of the 1940s. The revisions of the discourse can in part be predicted from its internal instabilities as well. The notion of authorship remained an unsolved problem in the discourse of the 'quality film', partly because traditional notions seemed incapable of adaptation to cinema production. It is an outstanding irritant in the discourse which was displaced only later.

An analysis of the discourse of the 'quality film' demonstrates the way in which terms gain their definitions one from another. I have always found the critical terms used at this time peculiarly opaque: they were familiar words yet they seemed to have no meaning when written in the particular enunciations of the critics. The sense of vagueness and imprecision in the comments comes

- 18 exactly from being outside the system of the discourse. To that extent, it was probably easier to try to trace these terms than those of the current quality film criticism within whose terms I am inevitably implicated. Yet this work on the terms of the 1940s has to some extent clarified those of the current criticism, as I try to indicate in my concluding remarks. It is a piece of historical reconstruction which I see as necessary for the constitution of any history of the cinema during that period, but it is more as well. It begins to give an idea of the way in which 'art cinema' constructs itself as an object given to critics and public alike, the constellation of terms which were capable of defining this object at one particular historical moment. The distance between these terms and those used currently can now be examined, and the points of possible reformulation and instability identified. The object 'art cinema' is now a political question in the development of an independent cinema in this country: this research is a contribution to the examination of that question.

Method

The method I have used is one of writing out the discourse, term by term, using as far as possible particular enunciations drawn from writings of the period. It is a kind of attentive listening, trying to transcribe the various random comments and remarks of different individuals into the complete systematisation that they were never given. The result is an argument which begins with the ethical presuppositions of the position which advocated the 'quality film', moves through the particular criteria which delineate the object 'quality film' and ends with the particular conceptions of industry and audience in which this object was implicated. At this point, a historical change is indicated: a response within the writing to the disillusion of its original project to promote 'quality film'. The method is sympathetic rather than critical in the sense that no denunciation of the terms takes place as they are explicated. The reason for this is vital: it is a matter of reconstituting the system of a language rather than mastering it by asserting another. The understanding of the way in which terms are created and deployed becomes more subtle this way: the points of instability can be identified. However, the luxury of a certain irony (no doubt the mark of authorship) appears at certain points where the discourse seems most flagrantly deaf. This enters within the self-referential system which constitutes the object 'quality film', as its terms are set out below. The method takes the pronouncements of a certain group of critics in daily papers and periodicals on a selected series of mostly British films from the period 1942-9. Fragments from these pieces of writing are then recombined and written out to demonstrate the system of the discourse. The critics who are given this treatment are those of the 'quality' daily or

Sunday papers, together with those other papers which employed more radical critics at one time or another. The list of newspaper sources is thus: *News Chronicle*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Reynold's News*, *Daily Mail*, *Mirror*, *Daily Sketch*, *Evening News* (London), *Evening Standard* (London), *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, *Sunday Express*. A number of weekly magazines also appear as sources: *New Statesman*, *Spectator*, *Tribune*, *Time and Tide*, *Our Time*. The critics identifiable by name are: Elspeth Grant, Simon Harcourt-Smith, Jympson Harman, C A Lejeune, Joan Lester, Fred Majdalany, Frank Mullally, Dilys Powell, E Arnot Robertson, Stephen Watts, Noel Whitcomb, William Whitebait, Richard Winnington, Basil Wright. The films were a randomly selected list of 60 British prestige films produced between 1942 and 1949. The reviews were drawn from the British Film Institute microfiche collection whose selectivity itself indicates a preference for this particular critical discourse: it is only towards the end of the period that the popular press critics and *Daily Worker* (now *Morning Star*) begin to appear. This selectivity was partly balanced by using collections of film criticism when possible: this resolved itself in practice to the cases of Richard Winnington and Caroline A Lejeune.

A second series of sources was used; the more considered pieces of writing (some by the above critics themselves) which appeared in two cinema journals closely associated with the development of the conception of 'quality film': *Sight and Sound* and the *Penguin Film Review*. During the war *Sight and Sound* was a dull educational journal, which changed in 1945 to become a substantial quarterly magazine of serious film criticism addressed to a wider audience than educators and film lecturers. The *Penguin Film Review*, edited by Roger Manvell, R K Nielson Baxter and H H Wollenberg, aimed to be a 'progressive review' of the cinema, publishing articles by critics and those working in the cinema, as well as reviews of world production. With a claimed readership of over 25,000, it ran sporadically for nine issues between August 1946 and May 1949, never attaining a regular publication pattern. These magazines provide a remarkable diversity of contributors and a remarkable consistency in writing, a sure indication that a discursive system is in operation rather than freak and isolated individual outpourings in some private or appropriated language. It is this system that is reconstructed from the individual utterances contained in these sources. The critics themselves recognised to some extent the originality of their project and the object they were constituting, different from traditional 'art cinema', and addressed to a wide public who know little of it:

'The arty boys have so far confined their activities to the productions of the French and Russian cinemas, with a faint bleat about cashing in on Shakespeare. The cinema may think itself

- 20 fortunate that its name is not bandied back and forth with those of Sartre, Connolly, Lady Gregory and Dylan Thomas. But it may think itself unfortunate that no one, with the exception of Roger Manvell, has seen fit to publish a book about it for the mass of the public whose opinion, totalled, should be the criterion for good taste'.

D A Yerrill, *Sight and Sound* Summer 1947, p 46.

It is the definition of this space that can now be traced.

1 Human Like Oneself

A humanist conception of mankind is central to the critics' discourse, to their vision of film and its purpose.

Man is a universal, facing *tremendous universal questions*¹, and speaking *the human idiom in French, English or Turkish*.² Mankind is divided into nations or cultures which can produce considerable differences. *We in Britain have been involved in six years of total war and we are now as remote in outlook from the citizenry of the Mid-West of America as we are from that of the Fiji Islanders*.³ Yet beyond these divisions of nation and culture there exist *the human values of every situation, tragic, tense, grave or gay*⁴ which *identify man with man and place with place*.⁵ We all share *the human plight*.⁶ In the aftermath of war, mankind is faced with the awe-inspiring task of reconstruction, the eradication of ignorance, disease and poverty. An understanding of the specific problems of each culture and sensitivity to human values are the means of realising these heroic aims.

Who is capable of such tasks? *Not a propagandist but a passionately interested observer, a man with a point of view but no panacea, prejudices but no firm faith*,⁷ a man of *pacifist acceptance and humanitarianism*,⁸ an *adult mind*⁹ capable of sensitivity to the *insufficiently appreciated truth*,¹⁰ an *affirmer of life* [with a] *passionate humanitarian conviction*.¹¹ This attitude is not given, but achieved across and through man's basic nature. Mankind's nature is conceived according to the image of a graph, with one axis polarised around mind and heart, the other around surface and depth. This graph is the chart of a man experiencing and developing values. He (for a man is always – and despite the fact of a significant number of women among the critics – a 'he', unless he is 'one') *has to be trained to distinguish real and lasting values from poor and shoddy substitutes*.¹² The ability to discriminate between deep and surface values is the product of a definite *balance between mind and heart*,¹³ between the two great faculties of man: his understanding head or force of intellect, and his passion, his emotion, his heart. The defeated peoples of Europe, for instance, are *deeply concerned with war as with a passion which must be expressed to be purged*,¹⁴ moving deep emotion

towards deep thought, avoiding shallow intellectual compromises. 21 Again, it is to be remembered that *without some ghost of a message from one human heart to another, no record, however factual, can be either truthful or complete*; ¹⁵ the head alone is not enough, one must be both intelligent and humane.¹⁶

Man is prey to symptoms of a *perverse and decadent imagination*¹⁷ if this balance is not achieved. There will be a failure because this is part of the common lot of humanity, but man can be prepared for *the moral dilemma which faces us and the man next door a dozen times in our lives*,¹⁸ and can face it courageously, without illusions. It is because of the univarsity of man and of the values that animate him that MAN can become MEN, *real human beings*¹⁹ with an individuality contrasting strongly with the *rubber-stamping*²⁰ process threatening to emerge in modern society. Each individual has their own way of looking at life,²¹ and if you look closely enough into a person you discover his world.²² Yet in these war-time and post-war years this individuality is less vital than the question of whether *personal qualities are equal to the demands made upon them*; ²³ individuality is not quirky, it is rather the *trick of living one's life or doing one's work with an intense personal conviction, an utter singleness of purpose* – that is, as if one meant it, with all one's heart.²⁴ What the individual should aspire to is a belief in precisely that which gives him his validity: a belief in man and the universal purpose of man.²⁵

The civilised man can be brought close into the feelings and lives of people,²⁶ can be brought to perceive not only the cause of conflict but the effects of it on human beings; all the facets of human behaviour and the amazing qualities of people at grips with life and forces beyond their control,²⁷ the pressing problems, both at home and overseas, which depend for their solution largely on the understanding and sense of responsibility of the ordinary citizen.²⁸ The civilised, thinking man is able to respond to the human appeal or persuasion²⁹ of others, to be ravaged²⁹ by the agony of ordinary people caught in succeeding waves of misery, the sources of which are never clear to them.²⁶ It is this attitude that is central to the critics' writing, that of a man who is compassionate,⁸ lucid; hopeful and clear-eyed.³⁰

2 Light in the Darkness

Cinema has a particularly important role to play as a medium of artistic expression and as a means of public information and education.³¹ It can at once entertain, inform, secure attention, touch emotions.³² It is propaganda and pleasure mixed: not only a new form of entertainment but a novel instrument for influencing the taste, mode of life and emotions of virtually unlimited numbers. Films are a new art. Even more than that: by cinema a new sense through which to experience the visible world he lives in has been

22 created for man.³³ The propaganda function of cinema is seen either as nationalistic or as internationalist. The nationalist argument is usually directed against the imposition on the British character of foreign manners, talk and thought by films from overseas;³⁴ the internationalist argument is for films which focus the camera lens on life³⁵ films which seriously attempt to make a contemporary comment on the way of life, problems and character of any people anywhere on this earth.²⁷ Narrow chauvinism is almost completely absent; instead, there is a great belief in national culture allied to the realisation that it is more important than ever that the peoples of the world should get to know each other, that they should understand how their neighbours live, what are their difficulties, their desires and, indeed, what are the fears of different nations. It becomes of extreme importance that we should use every means at our disposal of giving people that sympathetic, mutual understanding which is the only basis for true and lasting friendship. Literature is one of these vehicles, but even more effective is the film.³⁶

If the cinema is to be effective, realism, logic, truth must all be bent to the traditional requirements of drama and comedy, though they must never be renounced entirely. If we are interested in the use of the entertainment film as a means of cultural and educational enlightenment, we must not deprive it of its power to 'take us out of ourselves'. Therein lies the subtle influence of the film.³⁴ The fiction film, popular cinema is the central concern, its job, like that of the novel, is to tell a story entertainingly;³⁷ if the story is lacking, it is difficult to conjure up the film.³⁸ In this context, filmmakers are to be encouraged to make films about subjects which demand and deserve thought,³⁹ and to ensure that the problems are unavoidably present.²⁸ It is no good, however, producing a well-meaning bore,⁴⁰ as *Men of Two Worlds* is accused of being, for all that it has a subject, it is about something [and] it is getting somewhere.⁴¹ It is rather a matter of finding a method that bridges the gap between talkies and life, between actors and human beings,⁴² producing the dramatic link with real-life people and their problems.⁴³ This is essentially a mixture of universal values and particular individual emotional complexes. It is the ability to view action and character as a human pattern to be translated in terms of a formal pattern,⁴⁴ in such a way that the resulting emotional experience will catch, in words and pictures, so many things that are penetratingly true.⁴⁵ *Brief Encounter* catches the whole colour, the spring, the almost magical feeling of the discovery that someone's in love with you, that someone feels it's exciting to be with you; that is something so tenuous that it's never been put on the screen: and yet it's here.⁴⁵ This fiction film is capable of inducing a feeling of closeness to the personality of each⁴⁶ character, to present not an abstraction but a man,⁹ through the affinity created between the audience and the film as an emotional experience. Issues present

themselves through this affinity because the films *reveal the individual in his own environment*.²² 23

Issues thus become a matter of the individual's encounter with fundamental values in a particular situation. Profundity of values and warmth of emotion thus go hand in hand: *the increase of humanity needed in our films is . . . difficult to define . . . The success of Brief Encounter abroad was due . . . to the warmth of feeling in the conception of character and acting in Celia Johnson's part. In too many even of our good films, foreign audiences feel the characters and the acting quite unexciting because the men are cold and the women brittle, conveying only the surface of human life and not its depths.*⁴⁷ In the quality film values, issues and emotions should interpenetrate so that *we shall no longer be able to keep up any pretence of not knowing ourselves.*⁴⁸ The whole process of the quality film can be summed up as 'light in darkness': it comes to enlighten the dark cinema halls filled with people used to murkier experiences. The problem with contemporary films is that in general, *they are mere patterns of light and shade, mere noise to illuminate and warm a hall where you go as you might to a bar in search of oblivion on a strictly business basis.*⁴⁹ The certain glorious exceptions⁵⁰ of the quality of film means that audiences are beginning to want and enjoy better screen stories; they are beginning to THINK in the luxurious hypnotic darkness of the cinema.³⁹ The ideal is that of the screen realised and released, both pacifist and universal.⁵

3 Departments

Film is a composite art: film-making consists of several departments⁵¹ or elements. Film criticism concerns itself with the quality of performance in each department: in script and story; in photography and the visual; in acting; in the setting or background; in music; cutting and in direction. The critic *must identify the many separate elements that flow into a film.*⁵² Yet organising every comment on specific departments are conceptions of the ideal form of construction of a film (as a unity), and of a moral imperative (a relation to the real). The two conceptions of unity and the real provide the basis for the critics' work.

4 Organic Unities

In the ideal film, all the elements of cinema are matched, wedded, woven together or integrated to achieve consistency, cohesion, pattern and logic: unity. A film fails when it lacks purpose, is constructed episodically or in a mixture of styles. Such terms are the touchstones of criticism, and as such they are repeated in specific instances rather than elaborated together in a statement of belief. Disagreements take place within the categories about

24 their application to various films, and not about the validity of the categories themselves.

Unity is the perfection of cinema. *The perfect weaving of sound, movement and texture into a story creates an effect, through mind and heart, that no other medium could so quickly or so generally achieve.*⁵⁵ What is required is a film that has unity and sureness, one that never stumbles in confusion,⁵³ a film that is logical, well-shaped, cohesive.⁵⁴ Unity is important because it creates or reveals (the discourse hesitates here) a sense of purpose, a coherent purpose that may or may not be linked to a controlling intelligence. Films that display the characteristics of unity move according to some sort of a design.⁵⁵ They are therefore those that can be seen to possess a greater or lesser force of self-belief or purpose achieved.⁵⁶ We can see a film that could so easily have been a vast agglomeration of visuals and sounds, and no more. But [the director] has used no sight, no noise, however brief, which is not germane to his overall purpose.⁵⁷ Everything falls into place within the jig-saw facility of construction, the rounded completeness . . . [as a result of] a pattern, a carefully composed pattern conceived in the mind of a deliberate artist.⁵⁸ A seriousness . . . makes the artist and the craftsman regard his work not simply as a means of entertaining or pleasing or instructing, but as a thing in itself both beautiful and important.⁴⁴

Unity and its attendant sense of purpose is achieved through a consummate economy,⁵⁹ without diversion of the interest to trivial episodes.⁶⁰ *The true essence of the cinema [is] the highlighting and wedding of detail to action.*⁵⁵ Elements do not appear in themselves, though criticism will point to them individually. Thus, though acting is an element often remarked upon, a film of quality like *Went the Day Well?* owes some of its unity to the way in which no player detaches himself from the mosaic of village society.⁶¹ In the same way, *Millions Like Us* is admirable because background was not merely authentic scenery, it was integrated with the story. So was the humour which arose naturally out of situations, or characters, never sandwiched in as deliberate comic relief.⁶² And again, photography, dialogue, acting and settings can be integrated to produce a unified emotional effect: *these scenes had a clipped documentary reality which related the broken accents of true love to the background of the film and gave them poignancy.*⁶³ The sense of unity of a film gives the impression that everything unfolds naturally, in a perfect pattern or flow, a view that is echoed in the very construction of critical judgements themselves, eg *Powell and Pressburger have alighted upon a theme coincident with its inspirations and its ability and a story which arises naturally from that theme.*⁶⁴

It is possible that aberrant elements can be compensated for by the effect of reality of certain very exceptional films, particularly Italian neo-realist films: it is episodic and sprawling, the photo-

graphy is by no means good . . . but it touches the mind and heart as no film within years has done.⁶⁵ But without this startling effect of reality, several memorable, even great, scenes do not atone for the quality of the remainder.⁶³ Even worse, a mixture of forms rather than a unity of form produces a sense of vertigo that is vaguely felt as corrupting: opening with acid realism, developing into fantasy and finishing on a note of melodrama, Powell and Pressburger's new film *The Red Shoes* is a strange mixture . . . I left the cinema with a slightly dazed sense of returning from some strange exotic nether regions. This is caused by the mixture of styles I have mentioned and by the episodic nature of the story, but even more by the flamboyance of its spectacle, combined with the almost brutal insistence on back-stage atmosphere.⁶⁶ What is desirable in a film is the unity, the logic and the force of a film as a connected entity.⁶⁷ Unity has certain characteristics: flow, visual narrative, and tone which link together to form the harmonious whole.

5 Flow

Unity is neither static nor monotonous. It is realised as the film unfolds, and the habitual image for this process is that of a liquid flowing in a definite direction, smoothing over impediments, lubricating, carrying the audience along. The aim is to *make a film flow visually*.⁶⁸ The flow sweeps up all the elements so that actors are carried along on the flow of [the] feeling which never misses a point or underlines a word.⁶⁹ The quality film is sublimely conceived and wrought with an uninterrupted flow of camera logic.⁷⁰ Flow produces the sensation of poetry. Once the unified direction and liquidity of the film is established, it can be seen that the screen is a running pattern: ⁷¹ flow is metrical and measured, there is a perfect shape [to] every sequence and [a] perfect rhythm, visual and aural, [to] the whole film.⁷² The rhythm of music and movement [applies] the poetry of mathematics to the practicality of drama.⁷¹ Flow is therefore poetic because it is periodised, rhythmic and organised so that the screen sings;⁷³ it is logical because the poetic organisation rests upon an overall purpose. Logic and poetry are the products and characteristics of flow. Flow is the mastery of one of the fundamentals of the film: movement.

6 The Visual

The movement at the heart of the cinematic is visual movement. This is a new stress in film criticism, burlesqued by the older critic James Agate in *The Tatler* as the mark of the highbrow Dilysians. He gleefully writes that his cherished colleague, who henceforth gives her name to this abtruse coterie, wrote a Sunday or two ago: 'If the film has its own validity as an art it must affect us

26 by its own methods, which are basically, though not exclusively, visual'.⁷⁴ Agate's ability to mock visual tomfoolery⁷⁴ is a prime instance at once of the novelty of the critics' discourses, and of the difficulty this discourse itself experiences around the notion of the visual.

The visual is seen as a seduction. If it is the element that marks the cinema as distinctive from any other art, then, equally, it is something that has to find its place in the patterned unit of the film. However it often exceeds its limits, so that *visual eloquence becomes visual rhetoric, mere flowers of effect rather than active participation in the atmosphere and action of a story.*⁷⁵ A distinction has to be made between purely photographic qualities which produce seductive imagery only, and the more profound quality of visual narration. *Experts on the film are suckers for photography, and when they rave about a film like [Our Vines Have Tender Grapes] it is almost like claiming that a shoddy book is worthwhile because of its beautiful typesetting.*⁷⁶ It is well to be reminded of the basis of cinema. Today the sound-track usurps more than its share of narration: sound, dialogue and the insidious orchestra weaken the practice of visual narrative.⁷⁶

Visual narrative, cinematic sense,⁷⁷ visual stories [which] make their main effects purely by visual images,³⁸ these are the rare moments of cinema which the critics crave.⁵⁵ Faced by these moments, they are reduced to rapturous description, a limp tautology of the film's own flow: *The complex of action is superbly traced in visual and aural images. Consider, for instance, the sequence of the hold-up and the first half-escape; the alarm bell clanging madly as the figures struggle on the ground, the shots, the frantic calls for hurry, the figures somehow bundled into the car, and the confusion as the wounded man slips and falls and lies on the crown of the road. Then the look back from the racing car, the figure struggling up, the dog yapping behind him as he runs along the street, and over the allotments and crumples, sobbing for breath, in the air-raid shelter; and the shadowy silence of the shelter; and the frightened couple backing away; and the little girl, rattling along on one roller skate, who comes to find the ball which has bounced gently down the step to the feet of the fugitive.*⁴⁴ Such moments of visual narration flow according to some overall design. *The sheer visual pleasure they afford*⁷⁸ has its place in the unity of the film. Let us say that in the novel, plot characterisation and style are the three chief ingredients. Who can deny that style is what gives the book its flavour? So in the movie visual description, the poetry of the camera, makes the best banal or beautiful.⁶³ Visual seduction must be integrated into the unity of the film as a whole.

The coherent flow of visual narrative creates the overall mood of a film, its emotional tone. It is a favourite stylistic device to list films for the purpose of comparison, characterising their mood with well-chosen epithets: *Great Expectations had romantic breadth*, *Brief Encounter its sad music*, *Odd Man Out its poetic slant on the human plight*.⁶ The mood is described as though it were a voice: the voice of the film itself, speaking in warm tones, excitedly or dispassionately as the case may be. There are certain tones that the critics respond to, others that repel them, like *uplift, and mock-simple, sermonising or instruction*,⁷⁹ or the point-less hyperbole of most American films. The range of vocal colouring that most appeals to them is restrained, the voice carrying discretion, discrimination and taste.⁸⁰ Wherein lies the greatness of the British fictional war film? *Maybe our native instinct for understatement is the only way to balance the savagery of war. Maybe it's just simple sincerity*.⁸¹ Sincerity is very close to restraint, *the restraint which refuses to follow each emotion to saturation point*.⁸² Such films speak with a simplicity which is most satisfying and in all [their] admirable restraint [they are] far more moving than any picture deliberately designed as a tear-jerker.⁸³

Restraint is a matter of authenticity and understanding,⁴ of a certain detachment¹⁰ in attitude where a film understates its message¹² rather than being forced to be painfully obvious in subject-matter and technique.⁵ The danger with a restrained attitude is that it might become lifeless: instead of an *unsentimental warm-heartedness*⁸² a frozen, bloodless corpse. Part of the problem with the decline in British quality films after the war is that *the blood of war has drained from pure British veins more quickly than those of the Continental countries which have endured occupation*.¹⁴ Stage-bound acting tends to give our films the aetherial glow of anaemia.⁵⁵ Restraint has another danger, too, that of precluding certain emotional attitudes and states from full consideration. The result is a film like *Fanny by Gaslight* which is aesthetically correct where it might have been passionate; there is a coldness in both its glitter and its shadow; a coldness for which, I believe, reluctance to admit true raffishness into the chaste precincts of contemporary cinema is to blame.⁸⁴ Restraint in a film's attitude is the mark of its good taste and intelligence.⁵¹ A restrained tone which does not preclude consideration of the baser aspects of human nature will yield a *great and beautiful picture, adult, elating and inspiring*.⁸⁵

8 'The Test of all Good Technique is Unobtrusive Service'⁹¹

This, then, is the ideal form of construction that makes a quality film: it is a unified and purposeful whole; it has the poetry and logic of a smooth flowing pattern; it controls the seduction of the

- 28 photographic in the interests of a visual narrative; it adopts a restrained yet adult tone. Though the critic will detail the various elements that are particularly noteworthy, it is the overall unity and purpose which are most important. This implies that during the actual experience of the film, each element of the film is invisible, submerged in the overall flow. The ideal is to present a picture that is *sketched with strokes the casual artlessness of which conceals a considerable art*,⁸⁶ constructed with cutting that is ingenious enough to hide its own brilliance.⁸⁷ Yet this invisibility is a difficult effect to achieve. It can easily become a style rather than a spontaneous effect. It then becomes *pedestrian*.⁸⁷ By the late 1940s the situation is reached where in *acquiring perfection the movie camera has lost range and adventurousness . . . As they get glossier British films get emptier and sillier*.⁸⁸

The way is open for an aesthetic renewal. It is a renewal that comes not from Britain but from Italy; and not in terms of perfection of the unified construction and smooth flow of a film, but in terms of the other great imperative which governs this criticism: the real. Italian neo-realism comes as a fresh influx of the real which disrupts the accepted forms of perfected construction in the interests of a fresh effect of reality. *Rossellini's staccato use of the camera, his crude, unfinished portraits of the boy's family and general roughness of style, will no doubt jar on those who like their films fully explained, rounded and smooth*.⁸⁹ The similarities with Bazin's idea of equilibrium profile,⁹⁰ the shifting balance between construction and the effect of reality, are unmistakable.

9 The Truth of the Real

The real is an absolute, the correlative of mankind. It exists outside films, beyond representation: the moral imperative for the quality film is that of representing the world correctly, avoiding *misrepresentation of place and character for the sake of convention or the susceptibilities of romance*.⁹² The real is therefore primarily a moral imperative, and it is often equated with truth itself: the two terms become interchangeable. *Sunday Dinner for a Soldier, one of the truest pictures to come out of America – true in its unsentimental delineation of near poverty with all its simple hopes and joys*.⁹³ This conflation of terms can be taken even further to encompass other imperatives as well, when the critic is thinking of a quality in recent British films which can be most succinctly expressed as *Truth*. Alternatively it can be called *Logic or Sincerity*.⁹⁴ The point at which the discourse slides into tautology of this order is the point at which its moral fulcrum operates. The discourse turns upon a term that is self-evidently true, necessary and comprehensible: the real. Films which show the real can be *sordid, harsh, salty, alive . . . [It is] in the nature of things [that they] impart the documentary feel we crave for and miss in*

other films with ostensibly worthier objects. This quality contains the true essence of the cinema.⁵⁵ It affirms the cinema as well as life.²² 29

The moral force of the category of the real is often turned against those who are seen to be selecting, concentrating on some morbid qualities to the exclusion of others. Hence *those artists who work with a deliberate exclusion of beauty are sadly misinterpreting the temper of the people. The adulation of the spiv and all that goes with him is simply a pretence of the unfit and mannered minority, and the sooner his cult is expelled from the cinema the better for us all.*⁵⁴ Any film that eschews a representation of reality inevitably runs the risk of falling prey to a *perverse and decadent imagination*.¹⁷ Realism, the method of the real, has several characteristics, as does unity, the preferred method of filmic construction. But where unity is composed of a confluence of the separate departments of film-making, realism is more a matter of levels or layers: unity is expressed through a series of ideas which lead from one to another in a harmonious chain; realism consists of different approximations to the real in a hierarchy moving from surface to depth – approximations because film involves a definite form of organisation (narrative) – surface and depth because the real can be approached from different angles.

10 Concentrating the Mind Wonderfully

Cinema's relation to the real is not that of mirroring: it is a more subtle relation of *making contact with the living world*⁹⁵ through a process of narrative construction. Unity describes the preferred form of this construction: it is linked to the real, but it does not ape the real. The problem with the *genuine* is [that it is] *apt to sprawl*. *Artifice can concentrate in a single moment what the lazy eye and mind take hours to see and comprehend; and such concentration, after all, is half the art of narrative.*⁹⁶ The filmic narrative, properly handled, has *the ability to combine absolute authenticity of background and character with the artificial movement forward of a prepared narrative.*⁹⁷ This realistic style [presents] *life with an authenticity and understanding, heightened only by the intensity of the emotions revealed by the story and the acting required by them.*⁴ Granted this, there is . . . *an extraordinary power in the drama of actuality, a power which no contrived thriller, with its characters 'based on no living person' can ever achieve.*⁹⁷ The power that the drama of actuality has is one of using the concentration of the film form, with its unity, poetry, coherence of purpose and invisibility of technique, in order to go beyond it, to create an experience of the world, its people, its values. *Anyone who has seen the Italian film Roma Città Aperta will agree that it has unforgettable realism. It does not need a very close examination of the film, however, to realise that so far from*

30 being 'realistic' in the commonly held sense of the term, it is a rather 'mannered' piece: it is a film in which the 'art' is singularly ill-disguised . . . It is a pattern, a carefully composed pattern conceived in the mind of a deliberate artist. The result, on reflection, is real to a terrifying degree; frightening because with no conscious effort we find ourselves living again moments in the film. We have lived with the people in the film, we know them; and when we recall the film we recall our own experience.⁵⁸ Realism is a method of concentrating the real that can yield a shattering and salutary emotional experience. Belief in mankind, the understanding of individual or national problems; unity and poetry, realism and faithfulness to the real combine in the finest quality films. It remains to examine the different levels at which realism can be faithful to the real.

11 Duplication

The surface level of realism is the duplication of the semblance of the real. It is the 'trick' of getting the right atmosphere, which is largely attributed to technical polish. So we have *the effect of a film made in Berlin, though only the outside scenes, which are excellent, were photographed there. [So the director] can be congratulated on the realism of his back projection.*⁵⁹ This technical assurance has the effect of *imbuing every studio shot . . . with that feeling of absolute actuality.*⁶⁰ It can yield a particular form of visual pleasure which, properly handled, can contribute greatly to the overall impact of a film. For instance, *It Always Rains on Sunday* has an amused, a devoted attention to the tiny decorations of the everyday, to the chattering neighbour, the darts game and the black cat brushed with an exasperated gesture off the sofa-head. These trifles mark the difference between the studio set and the room lived in; and an audience convinced of the realism of the scene it watches becomes submissive to the movement of the story.⁶⁰

Duplication of the external aspects of the real is often equated with background. This habitual term is the product of the separation into departments of character (the product of script and acting) and setting (the product of art direction, use of location etc). Background is thus the filmic equivalent of a backdrop before which the players perform. We see *backgrounds like the pierrots on the beach before the war, the canteen dance, [which are] observed with a lucid eye.*⁶² Yet to achieve a duplication of the surface of the real which can contribute to the overall unity of the film, it is necessary to go beyond the implications of the term 'background', to dissolve it into the flow of the action. So with *Brighton Rock* what is particularly striking in this brilliant and horrible English piece is its handling of background. . . . To the record of menace and split-second action [it] adds touches of grotesquerie, ironic pictorial comments which give features to the face of vio-

lence.¹⁰⁰ An integrated background can provide a surface realism 'features' to, to deeper meanings 'the face' which are produced at another level. 31

12 Authenticity

Authenticity is a deeper level of realism. Beyond the convincing detail or background, it demands that the whole reality of the narrative be *true to life*.¹⁰¹ The absolutely authentic film is one in which *there is never a moment . . . when it does not feel like real life*.¹⁰² Authenticity is a feeling induced in the spectator of closeness to events: *the film [of the Berlin Olympiad] is a triumph, a complete use of the movie to describe a great event. The omnipresent cameras work at every speed from slow motion to normal and from every angle and distance to induce a feeling of closeness to the personality of each competitor. Style and character astonishingly come through.*⁴⁰ It is equally that of creating a plausible universe like the *flurries, flounces, turmoils and sweat of that esoteric life behind the curtains of the ballet in the portrayal of which . . . Messrs Powell and Pressburger touch better cinematography and better realism than in any other of their films . . . You almost accept the Svengali-Diagalev of Anton Walbrook . . . the long shots of practising dancers, the snippets of dancing, the wit of Massine, the general truth of atmosphere*.¹⁰³

There are two spheres in which authenticity is a crucial issue in British films: those of class and of sex. *We are in our class-consciousness unsuccessful at depicting the ordinary men and women of Britain in character accent or behaviour.*⁹⁵ The problem is that ordinary people are caricatured, seen as generalisations rather than as individuals. *The tradition of English life has imposed on its ruling classes a veneer of good manners and imperturbability which brilliantly conceals surface as well as temperamental individuality; to look at character thus becomes eccentric. The working and lower-middle classes have no such mask, and the temptation for the script-writer to exaggerate natural individuality until it turns to farce is clear.*¹⁰⁴ However, progress is made in producing authentic, recognisable working class characters. In *Millions Like Us*, widely regarded as a landmark, the characters are perceived as *connecting somewhere with reality*.⁹⁸ Nothing more clearly marks the coming-of-age of the British cinema than its treatment of ordinary working people, especially as minor characters or in the mass. *The clowns of ten years ago first became the lay figures of sociological drama and then, with the war, patriotic heroes. In Millions Like Us, they are real human beings, and the British film has reached adult maturity.*¹⁰ In fact, one correspondent panics before this intrusion: *the continual accents with which the dialogue is delivered, though they are varied and represent different parts of Great Britain, tend to become monotonous. Surely it*

32 would not have detracted from the reality of the picture to have one character speaking the King's English ordinarily.¹⁰⁵

Sexuality is something that also presents problems for authenticity. With certain glorious exceptions, like *Brief Encounter*, blessedly adult, truthful and contemporary, everything to do with love in the cinema is early Victorian, adolescent at that.⁵⁰ It is an extraordinary thing that the cinema, which is notoriously preoccupied with love, should so seldom manage to produce a really convincing love story.⁷³ There is a prudery that prevents authenticity, which seems to centre in the portrayal of women's sexual feelings. To see [a female character in *Day of Wrath*] glow and grow smug and gay with fulfilment is to watch something that Hollywood doesn't understand – grown-up sex.¹⁰⁶ This lack of authenticity in the portrayal of female sexuality is linked closely to the difficulties with class: most British women of the screen are suburbanised and simplified into non-entity.¹⁰⁷

Authenticity is deeper than surface or background as it is concerned to make the demands of narrative congruent with a convincing emotional register similar to that of real life. This gives the narrative the illusion of life itself. Yet though it is possible for a film to get by without total authenticity at all moments, authenticity is itself not the final level of realism. There is a further level which is attained only rarely, and can even lead to the violation of other canons of realism and unity: it is faithfulness to the very spirit of the real.

13 The Spirit of Reality

Authenticity can produce a convincing illusion, but this effect is not the final level of realism. The deeper levels are not necessarily self-evident to everyone, as the duplication of externals and the authenticity of the illusion are. *The schizoid nature of the film lies . . . precisely in the fact that it is equally capable of creative expressiveness and literal representation; and while the former can be extremely potent and is vastly attractive to the few, elementary representation gratifies the multitude, because it rests on a more primitive level of sensibility.*¹⁰⁸ This creative, expressive level is that of emotional truth: it is not just that of providing a convincing representation, but of giving the total emotional experience of people and events so that their truth shines from the screen, *expressing the spirit of a country*⁹⁹ or of an individual. Art does not consist in repeating accurately what can be seen and heard around us. Art must try to conjure up, with the help of familiar symbols, things that are not perceptible to human eyes and ears. It must be a kind of second sight, what Baudelaire calls a '*sorcellerie evocatoire*'. The feeling of absolute actuality¹⁰⁹ is an exchange between spirits. It can even take place when other criteria of unity and realism are transgressed in various ways. The

Murderers are Amongst Us carries a UFA heritage of camera angles, 33
 neurosis, sentimentality and deviations into dim and fleshy cabarets. It is sombre, slow, intense, tragically moving and in common with the post-war Italian films as true as it can be to the surrounding reality.³⁵ The UFA heritage breaks criteria of accuracy to external details, and Italian neo-realism some of the demands for a finished, rounded unity of narrative. Yet both can reveal the spirit of the real. It is from this source that the impulse to aesthetic renewal comes.

14 The Search for Documentary

One term recurs in discussions of realism at this time. It is 'documentary', designating the area or spirit from which the aesthetic renewal of British films during the war years seems to have gained its inspiration. *There was a time – not so very long ago – when England's films flowed along opposite sides of the street, Reality and fiction, the documentary and the feature – every film kept to one side or the other, and disastrous was the occasional attempt to cross over.*¹¹⁰ It was during the war that the successful fusion took place, to the benefit of each form. For although documentary is the source of a precious impulsion towards the real, it has one characteristic that chills me. *There is a detachment in much of its work, an almost scandalised mistrust of showmanship, an effort, it would seem, to avoid, not only melodramatics, but any form of human appeal or persuasion.*¹⁵ The wedding of documentary and fiction⁶³ provides the way out of the problem: the fictional narrative can provide the emotional charge necessary to provide an empathetic link with the real, *for there could be no question that [a film like] San Demetrio, London 'covered the ground', and pretty succinctly, thanks to an approach less impersonal than would at one time have been conceivable in documentary circles. If, by severe standards, this was fiction, then it was fiction with the realism uppermost; and adventure was reconstituted, as nearly as could be imagined to the real event.*¹¹¹ There even appears a tendency that would like to redefine the documentary itself, away from the didactic phase of documentary on themes of contemporary life. *The individual, contrary to the Grierson tenet, becomes more and more important. He will be the core of the new documentary, whose aim will be to reach your mind not by giving a lecture but by telling a story.*¹¹² This new down to earth style of British documentary [would rely] on a central narrative and a stressing of human values and relations rather than on a series of images for their own sakes related to each other by montage and cutting (the old fancy style of documentary).¹¹³ Though documentary – however defined – carries a definite charge of reality, it seems as though it can only reach the spirit of the real if it adopts the

- 34 procedures of the fictional narrative, together with its stress on the central values of the human.

15 The Limits of Coherence

The critics' aesthetic thus has a strong internal logic, with ideas linking from one to another in order to constitute a definite object: the quality film. The quality film has purpose, form, and morality. It is linked to a strong humanist perspective, stressing the importance of international understanding between the various cultures of mankind. Film has a particularly important role in promoting this understanding, through the fiction film of quality. This is a unified construction, harnessing technique to produce a flowing visual narrative which refuses to indulge in overstated emotionality. It is imperative that this film have a close and deep relation to reality, not only reproducing its surface, but touching the very spirit of the real.

This is the extent to which the critics' discourse is coherent, in the sense that it constitutes a definite object. But there is more to the discourse than its coherent centre. There are certain terms that might have been thought to be central to the discourse, but are the subject of considerable hesitancy: the term of 'artist', 'artistic control' etc is the principle one. There is also a series of terms (industry, audience, British cinema) which define the particular strategies which are advocated to promote the quality film. The hesitancy about the term 'artist' is the point at which the weakness of the terminology and politics in relation to the film industry, the institution of cinema, begins to affect the discourse of the quality film itself. It is the point of transition or soldering between them.

16 Artist or Craftsman

*We can say that film technique is nearly advanced to the point at which the artist could control his medium wholly and bring it into the category of an art.⁵ On the rare occasions on which you do come across a film of character, then it is ten to one you will find a single creative intelligence behind it.*²⁴ Yet the nature of this single creative intelligence is by no means clear, nor is it necessarily always true that a film of quality (if not the truly exceptional creation) will be one in which the creative urge is that of a single individual. There are therefore several ideas about artistic creation which co-exist uneasily in the calls for more consideration to be given to the artist which tend to accompany the campaign for quality films. The first, the most familiar, is the notion that *the director's personality is decisive.*²³ The director is not, necessarily, an artist in the complete sense. There are the few, the inviolate artist [who] at the cost of comfortable popularity

[pursues] the logic of his own nature. He [gives] us a work that in all its power and weakness is the emanation of a single and matured mind.¹¹⁴ Such an artist is Chaplin. However, more usually, the director is not this self-expressive genius, rather he is a strong personality [who] holds together [the] great number of people [that] may contribute towards the final achievement. Orson Welles is a creator of that temper; so is Noel Coward; Alfred Hitchcock is another; so is Preston Sturges. . . . These men scrawl their signature across a film so boldly that no one can fail to read it.²¹ The director is rarely an individual artist, more usually he is a dominating personality, influencing the contributions of others.

Yet the position of the director at or near the centre of the filmic creation is by no means clearly established. We will find [the artist himself] not as a director or producer but as a writer who inscribes on paper, with a complete visual power of writing, the thing that will be put down on celluloid by craftsmen to the extent that in their individual spheres they are subservient to the film as a whole.⁵ The demand for unity in the design of a film is not necessarily tied to the controlling genius of the director. It can be the writer: in no other art form is the writer regarded as subsidiary to the technician and the interpreter. For the sake of the medium, as well as that of the writer, this position must be reversed.¹¹⁵ This elevation of the scriptwriter to the status of the originator and architect of the film's unified pattern is widely supported. This position clearly relates to the campaign of the American Guild of Screenwriters to improve their status. It is a campaign waged, in part, against the director. To my mind the problem is essentially one of director versus writer. Up till now the director has had the whip hand. It is he who is ultimately responsible for the shape and texture of the film . . . But surely in the case of an original screenplay for a film it is the screenwriter that supplies the creative talent while the director is merely an executant in charge of a group of skilled technicians?¹¹⁶ In addition to this hesitancy about the creative point of control, there is also a doubt about the extent to which such conceptions of the controlling artist are relevant to the bulk of film-making, to the necessary and respectable bread-and-butter of the industry. This is often seen as being the level of craftsmen, collaborating according to the conditions imposed by the industry to produce a work which has, if not startling originality, then polish, honesty and integrity. Such films are undoubtedly important, yet it is often very difficult to say exactly where the credit for their creation lies. They do not have the recognisable signature of a personal style or vision. So the call to release the artist from the unnecessary restrictions of Wardour Street is often extended to artists or craftsmen. The question of presiding creative intelligence is left unanswered at this time, unless stylistic or thematic concerns make it obvious that such a controlling individual has been at

- 36 work. Scriptwriter, director, even showman-producer: all of these are offered at one time or another as the possible rejuvenators of the hardening arteries of film-making.

17 Quality and the Other

It is part of the constitution of the object 'quality film' that it is defined against the dominant trends of the film industry, and that it seeks the widest possible audience to achieve its humanising effects. The two conceptions of industry and of audience are not nearly as systematic as the conception of quality film itself, yet they are central to the political attitude taken up by the critics in their campaign to improve the quality of film production. It is difficult to write the discourse at this point: being much less systematic, it is more prone to wavering with every event and every chance occurrence that assumes the status of an event through journalists' and publicists' attention. However, certain terms do appear: a generalised conception of what the industry could be like, and a shift in attitudes towards the mass audience that takes place over the period 1942-9.

18 The Film Industry

Film production is conceived like the factory in *Modern Times*: a production line that for obscure reasons still needs individuals to participate in it, but demands as the price of its efficiency that all individuality should be ironed out. *The film takes shape, like an automobile on an assembly line, from the original . . . to the final polish job.*¹¹⁷ The whole process is *big and vertical where it should have been small and horizontal.*⁵² This industrial process of production means a *bankruptcy of inspiration and the development of a blatant and monotonous insincerity*³ because the processes by which individuals and the system can work in harmony have been neglected. There should be a balance between the forces: a healthy discipline for the artist from the public, and a progressive enlightenment of the audience by artists; a policy of consciously aiding creativity without letting go of all considerations of box-office sanity on the part of producers. Instead, the usual situation is one in which *the present-day movie is forced to be painfully obvious in subject matter and technique because of the non-discriminatory methods of distribution and exhibition, but more because of the wholesale appeasement by the leading productive functionaries of box-office and business.*⁵ And it is obvious that the notion of 'box-office' does not necessarily express the tastes of filmgoers. *The hucksters of the cinema, the middlemen and the monopolists, have a lower set of values than the public whose pulse and pocket they have their fingers on and in.*⁵² In this situation, the artist and the audience become crucial. *The artist*

has been so humiliated, hectored and bedevilled that the poor degraded hack must be revitalised, nourished, cherished, respected and allowed to create again, for however much they pretend to the contrary, the film cannot live without ideas from men with creative imagination.⁸ The attitude of audiences to the work of artists is crucial. If they were to respond to more adventurous work, as the signs during the war seemed to indicate, then the industry moguls have to take notice. The resulting film industry would have a definite pattern of production, avoiding excessive spending in order to produce a greater quantity of quality British films.

The current product of all film-making countries can be divided into the low film, the middle film and the high film. The high film is comparatively rare, sometimes successful with the public and always valuable for prestige . . . The middle film is the staple box-office product, the reliable success, the film which offers sound entertainment without demanding too much or too little of the greater audiences' sensibilities. The lower film is the quickie, the noisy, raptureless programme filler, the B film in every implication of the letter.¹¹⁸ The aim, then, is to eliminate the B film, to avoid confusing lavish expenditure with lavish results, and to produce both films of exceptional merit like *Brief Encounter* and *Odd Man Out* which win us honours and awards at home and overseas,¹¹⁸ and those popular [films] that [do] not discard taste or atmosphere . . . and define basic British box office.¹¹⁹ We can hope to make films of [the] quality [of *Odd Man Out*] rarely;¹¹⁸ if the British film industry is to satisfy a bigger proportion of the home market and then . . . is boldly to compete for overseas markets, [then] business-like films like *The Seventh Veil*, which are sparing of time, studio-space and money, should be our main stock in trade. It is an example of the intelligent, medium-priced picture made with great technical polish which has represented for Hollywood the middle path between the vulgar and the highbrow.¹²⁰ Such a programme of production differs substantially from most of the activity actually undertaken in Britain after the war. It is through exhortation and encouragement of the audience, and constant criticism of the baser aspects of Wardour Street and the more excessive enterprises of J Arthur Rank and Alexander Korda that the critics hoped to effect a gradual change of the industry's attitude.

19 Optimism and the Audience

Criticism is concerned with raising the standards of the art, critics want to make a positive contribution to films . . . They are doing a first-class job now in making people critically aware of the content of films. Because of their efforts fewer and fewer people go to the pictures in a purely escapist mood. Audiences are beginning to THINK in the luxurious hypnotic dark of the cinemas. As

- 38 *a result, film-makers are encouraged to make films about subjects which demand and deserve thought.*³⁹ Critics can influence the kinds of films available by raising the standards of audience expectation. This is the hope of the war-time and immediate post-war years. It involves a definite conception of the nature and potential of the audience.

The seemingly endless flow of puerile pulp, synthetic sex and Technicolor goo¹²¹ can be attributed to the fact that the average mental age of the American audience is round 15 years.¹²² It is well-known that Hollywood insures its enormous expenditure by aiming at the lowest common denominator, and that the mental age of Americans is lower than that of our own people.³⁴ In British eyes [American films] lack quality and an adult approach.¹²² There is a very real feeling that the long-suffering public far from knowing what it wants is ready to accept almost anything and make the best of it.¹²³ The public is not so dim, not so lethargic, not so gullible as cinema believes. It is not a big baby that must be pampered and soothed to prevent it throwing porridge. Rather, it is a healthy adolescent, human, impressionable; but which needs a firm lead. It needs to be stimulated, too; it wants digging in the ribs, guidance, a sense of proportion and hope for the future.¹²⁴

So the critic hopes to see the screen catch its audiences young – since they're bound to be in the cinema, anyway – with the idea that in the long run films like *The Overlanders* are more 'fun' than glossy nonsense the audiences don't remember anything about the next day.¹²⁵ The result will be three-fold. First, an improvement in the quality of all pictures because only a demand from the people themselves can free the film aesthetically;³ second, the attraction into the cinemas [of] that section of the public, a section traceable to no particular social stratum, whose faculties have not been atrophied by sentiment, and by self-pity;¹²⁴ third, that the cinema audiences will be aided by every possible means to the contemplation of such things as exist in beauty, strength and, above all, truth. [For] isn't this the way to eliminate the tawdry and the gimmick, to destroy dishonest doctrine and banish ugliness and evil?¹²⁶

20 The Break in the Spiral

The terms in which the critics aim to promote quality films are those of an upward spiral, with a crucial position reserved for the critics themselves. Increased control by the creative personnel and latitude to create stimulating work will lead to an increase of quality which can be pinpointed, recommended and explained by the critics. The audience will be lead to appreciate the stimulation and lasting benefit derived from such films, and this in turn will encourage the industry to pay more attention to quality as the crucial term in their production policies rather than ballyhoo. This will give a new lease of life to the creative artists and craftsmen

who will improve the quality of their films still further, and pay 39
attention to the friendly advice offered by the critics.

The spiral broke down after the war during the turbulent years of 1945-9. The defining force in post-war film-making in Britain was the Rank Organisation, owning two of the three major circuits and most of the operating studio space. Their expansion programme, based on the success of British war-time films and the highest *per capita* cinema attendance in the world, consisted of expansion in all areas in order to consolidate their share of the domestic market and launch an attack on the American market. The American campaign was to be spearheaded by expensive 'prestige' films of some cultural merit; yet the terms in which Rank conceived of cultural merit and those promoted by the critics in the notion of the quality film only partially coincided. The critics were not particularly impressed by the expensive *Caesar and Cleopatra* (cost rumoured to be about £1,278,000), a spectacular version of a rather intractable Shaw play that became for them the prime example of the difference between the conceptions of 'prestige' and 'quality'. Rank did produce some films, particularly through the Independent Producers arrangement, which marked the growth of the British quality film for the critics. Yet these films, like *Brief Encounter* or *Odd Man Out*, met with incomprehension or derision in the more popular circuit cinemas. A gulf between the critics' taste and that of the popular audience began to become apparent after the war, and it centred around the rejection by some audiences of those films which most exemplified the critics' notion of quality. One break in the spiral was becoming apparent: despite the critics' condemnation of the 'imitation Hollywood' films that Rank was producing for the home market – *The Wicked Lady* is the usual title invoked here – and their promotion of the quality film, many audiences still actively preferred wicked ladies to the brief encounters of suburban housewives. This reaction began to force a reassessment of the initial conceptions of the audience.

Such a reassessment was further prompted by the increasing failure of the Rank expansion programme. Production losses of over £1½ million were returned in 1946. This was largely the result of the more spectacular productions rather than the quality films. But when the really disastrous losses were brought in as a result of the Dalton tax policy* in 1947-8, and Rank had to produce massive cutbacks in production, the quality film production units were cut along with the other 'prestige' products. Rank did not differentiate, as the critics did, between films of quality and films of expense with a veneer of culture. Suddenly, life became much more difficult for producers of quality films. The critics' hopes for a steady expansion in this area were dashed. They were left

* See 'Made in Ealing', *Screen*, v16 n1, Spring 1975, pp 83-5.

40 with the Pyrrhic consolation of knowing that their warnings had been correct, but without the secure basis of production for the home market that they had been advocating. Under these circumstances (the beginnings of a disillusion with the original policy of enlightening the audience; the loss of the possibility of expanding quality film production) the critics began to redefine their policy for promoting quality film. Based on the experience of the American successes of British quality films (*Henry V*, Ealing films), the idea of promoting specialised cinemas began to be widely canvassed: cinemas which would show international cinema, promoting quality and the associated values of humanism.

This shift in the critics' conceptions can now be traced briefly, through the critics' own writing.

In 1942 it is possible already to state that something has happened in British films since the beginning of the war. The pre-war film showed the sunny side, the villas and shop-fronts of *Filmlandia*. There, everything was posed and gaudy, and the sham fascinated. But with war exerting its pressure, the glamour of day-dreams faded, naturalism came into its own. The film fixed in reality no longer had to carry a rigidly unreal plot. Next of Kin, like *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, is an admirable example of the new kind of English film, actual, thrilling, taking its tune from events.¹²⁰ This movement continues: the number of good films about English life has been mounting up; *Millions Like Us*, *The Demi-Paradise*, quite recently have explored the unexplorable.⁴⁸ The influence of the documentary movement is, at this time and later, held responsible for the gain of reality – *Millions Like Us*, like many films of that time, was influenced by the documentary approach.⁶² The atmosphere is generally optimistic, ambitious comparisons are made, like the section [of *The Demi-Paradise*] describing the 1939 visit . . . the nearest thing ever to English *René Clair*.¹²⁷ *With This Happy Breed* and *Millions Like Us* and *The Way Ahead*, British films after the war should have their chance of becoming what we all should like them to be – English.¹²⁸ The critic can now make a contribution by identifying the points of strength and weakness. The great advances made by British films in the last five years are obviously not unconnected with the strengthening of the band of scriptwriters in this country; dialogue has grown livelier and more natural; the whole handling of the narrative more authoritative. But the qualities of dialogue and narration have not always been matched by the quality of the plot-making.³⁸

Then, as victory is achieved in Europe, the first vindication for many critics of their growing faith in British films is provided by Olivier's *Henry V*. If a flavour of smugness creeps into these notes

*this week you must be forebearing and think of me as a happy mother whose child whom the world deemed to be an idiot has at last proved himself the genius she always knew him to be. For those of us who love the cinema, and especially the English cinema, there have been moments lately when the flame burnt dim . . . Yet in spite of it all we kept faith, telling ourselves that cinema was an exciting and adult art and that one day English cinema would grow up. Well, the moment has come, our dream has happened.*¹²⁹ *Henry V* is one of a series of films from 1944-8 which are hailed as masterpieces of British cinema: the films, for instance, of Asquith, Carol Reed, Launder and Gilliat, the Boultings, Thorold Dickinson and David Lean among others are establishing a tradition of solid native skill.¹³⁰ Yet these were already being produced as part of an industrial movement that ran against the ideas being promoted by the critics. Where the critics emphasise quality, Rank's production programmes emphasise 'prestige' and 'breaking into the American market' by imitating Hollywood production values and expenditure patterns. And Rank is the dominant force in the industry at this time. *The conscious critic grasped and protested that financial success lay in a direction contrary to the Hollywood path of lavishness and extravagance, that it was parallel to the utmost development of the poetic realism Britain had forged in documentaries and near-documentaries.*⁵² I do not believe that the best British technicians, Mr Rank's or those of other producers, are temperamentally fitted to make 'American' films. I do not even believe that it is necessary. The reception given in this country recently to true-blue British pictures by at least the better-class audiences suggests that the taste for this kind of thing can be spread throughout the British Isles. I think that it is much more likely that American audiences will cultivate an extra taste for essentially British films than that an attempt to make 'American' films will enable our producers to break through the natural opposition of Hollywood's vested interests.³⁴ Mr J Arthur Rank's method of open attack on the American market by making the epic film to dazzle Americans will, I am certain, lead in the end to pleasing nobody and losing grasp of Britain's great moment. While Caesar and Cleopatra doesn't frighten Hollywood (if it does me), the success in Britain of *The Seventh Veil* and *The Captive Heart*, and even of those Gainsborough horrors *The Wicked Lady*, *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, and *Caravan* most emphatically does.⁵⁵ Extravagance in the hopes of catching international attention does not guarantee financial success; the development of a series of documentary-influenced, or low-budget quality films for the home market (or even a nonsense of period so authentically Hollywood⁴⁹ like *The Wicked Lady*) will provide a secure basis for further expansion.

There is one area in which Rank's policies coincide more with the critics' own recommendations. This is the policy of funding

42 certain production companies (Cineguild, Archers, Individual) with minimal interference into their development of projects. The importance of this policy is gauged by the interesting and significant films [like] *Brief Encounter*, *Rake's Progress* and *I Know Where I'm Going* [which] represent, above all, the great quality of contemporary British cinema, its independence and variety of style. This is due to the number of small units . . . all of which have developed an individuality of style contrasting strongly with the rubber-stamp Hollywood entertainment. About one-third of our total feature production can be relied upon to show the result of the growing talent of the dozen or more directors who are the imaginative strength of our cinema's renaissance. With complete freedom to make the films that capture their creative interest, they are continuing the tradition of good British cinema which was originally implemented mainly by the war film.²⁰

At the end of 1945, there is *Brief Encounter*, everything that a feature film had never dared be before. At the end of the next year, *Great Expectations* confirmed all the expectations of the Lean team: surely the last doubter will see what we, who have been signalling the advance of British films have been making all the fuss about.⁵¹ It is seen as the first big British film to have been made, a film that confidently sweeps our cloistered virtues into the open,⁵⁰ vindicating an uncomfortable urge to overpraise British films, to wish them, almost, into realms of thought and feeling they inherit but never fully enter.⁵⁰ It is soon followed by *Odd Man Out*, which can be ranked with the best and most serious cinema of the Continent,⁴⁴ more than a triumph for British films. It is an open proof that a film can satisfy every technical and 'highbrow' requirement, and still provide outstanding popular entertainment.¹³¹

The policy of providing freedom to creative units is not the success the critics hoped for. First, some of the units, Powell and Pressburger's company, Archers, in particular, are associated with some of the most reviled films of the period, moving increasingly further away from the essential realism and true business of the British movie¹³² and producing *A Canterbury Tale*, a reference point for a time for its violation of all the central tenets of quality. For this reason, it reduces critics to speechlessness: there was *Love Story* with its witless whimsy, *Kiss the Bride Goodbye* with its shoddy vulgarity, *A Canterbury Tale* . . .^{129*} The policy also gives Lean and Reed the time and resource to become 'prima donnas' [without which] they would have made rougher and possibly better films, certainly more.⁵² The disillusion with these two star directors becomes quite widespread with *The Third Man* and *Oliver*

* For a further examination of the way in which one Powell/Pressburger film (*A Matter of Life and Death*) engages in a criticism of some of the central assumptions of realist film-making at this time, see my analysis in *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, ed Ian Christie, British Film Institute, London 1978.

Twist. With *Oliver Twist*, Lean fails for the first time in his career to move forwards with a new film, and Lean is of all the directors in England the most favoured and most free, the most answerable to himself.¹³³ For Reed the indictment is rather more damning: certainly Britain's best talent, and yet one who is devoid of the urges that make a really great director.¹³⁴ Some day (I hope) Mr Reed will feel strongly and with passion on a subject and make a film about it.¹³⁵ 43

By 1948, with the results of the economic crisis in the industry putting into supreme control over British production the chartered accountant,¹³⁶ the critics' sense of doubt about British production becomes a sense of melancholia,¹³⁷ a sense of unfulfilled promise. In the half dozen or so years of the war and soon after, British film-making at last showed itself able to compete on a professional footing with the best of other countries; but having demonstrated the potentiality, it has since then been far too largely restrained from putting the potentiality into solid effect by the pressing requirements of quantity militating against quality, by an excessive reliance upon the converted play and converted novel, and by an ingenuous belief that more money spent must necessarily mean more value received.¹³⁸ In 1944, a critic compared himself to a proud mother; by 1948 the scene is one in which our critics have become too much like mothers who cannot see the faults of their own children.¹³⁹

As a result of the crisis, the Rank group deprives its creative units of their privileged access to funds, and in part blames them for the group's misfortunes. Mr Rank . . . has lost money, it seems, by making 'artistic and cultural' pictures for the sake of British prestige, and in doing so has put British directors and stars in the top flight. What are these triumphs of art before profit? *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Colonel Blimp*, *A Matter of Life and Death*, *Henry V*, *Men of Two Worlds*, *Odd Man Out*, *Brief Encounter*, *In Which We Serve*, *This Happy Breed*, *Great Expectations*, *The Way Ahead*, *A Canterbury Tale*. These and scores of ridiculously expensive minor films. Of them, five (less than one a year) can hold their own with half a dozen cheaply made post-war Italian pictures. The others are stillborn epics conceived and made in the sort of individualistic romp Mr Rank was lead to encourage in the name of Prestige.⁵² The deluxe prestige film and the merely extravagant ordinary film⁵⁰ between them have pushed all the tentative character out of British films.¹⁴⁰ Another explanation of the short history of disaster⁵⁰ is that no producer has tried to grapple with the problems of peace. David Lean has contented himself with pretty comedies and treatments of Dickens. Anthony Asquith dallies with trifles like *While the Sun Shines* and *The Winslow Boy*. Michael Powell roams in the realms of fancy with *I Know Where I'm Going* and *Black Narcissus*. The Boultings waste their talents on *Fame* is the *Spur* and *Brighton Rock*. Carol Reed has the stern *Odd Man*

The critics' disillusion with the kind of films being produced compared to the work, especially, of Italian Neo-Realism is not the only cause of the disenchantment with British cinema at the end of the decade. It was becoming increasingly clear that the hopes of raising the critical level of the audience were misplaced in the way that they had originally been formulated. A new, more defensive, attitude to the promotion of quality films begins to appear.

21 The Defence of Quality

By 1947 the strategy of encouraging more quality production, of exhibiting it widely through the circuits and backing it up with insistent newspaper and magazine criticism does not seem to have the desired effect. The good reception that was given to quality war-time pictures seems more and more to have depended on the fact of war rather than the fact of quality. The post-war quality film runs into problems with the mass audience who have problems understanding and appreciating them in the way that they are offered. *Economically, the middle stratum of cinema seems to be sold out to the adolescent wage-earner whose pay-packet in America and Britain has increased considerably since the war. In Britain it is true that there is very little for the adolescent to buy but pictures, and demand creates supply in values and emotional responses. It is difficult to get by with maturer films in the face of such audiences, who will no more understand the last part of Odd Man Out than they seem capable of realising that the first part of The Lost Weekend was not another alcoholic comedy.*¹⁸ This problem soon produces disillusion with the original policy: *can one believe that, any more than Henry V, Hamlet will make cultural inroads on a mass consciousness? Most will miss the deeper meanings of the soliloquies and speeches, instinctively resist blank verse and fail to grasp a plot that however simplified is still more complex than a dozen of the obscurest whodunnits?*⁶⁸ Late in 1947, Lean analyses *Brief Encounter's* commercial career in terms inherited from the industry that came increasingly to define the critics' estimation of the way cinema should develop. *British films have got themselves into their present position on what audiences call their 'reality' . . . You will be wondering why, in the light of all this, Brief Encounter did not 'go' with this great new and enlightened British audience. I think the answer is that in this particular case we went too far; too far, that is, from a box-office point of view. We defied all the rules of box-office success . . . A few years ago this would have been a recipe for box-office disaster, but this wasn't the case with Brief Encounter. The film did very well in this country in what are known as 'the better-class halls', and is now having a similar success on a smaller*

scale, in New York.¹⁴² A new logic is constructed, based heavily on the nature of the success of British quality films in the American market. *Thirty per cent of Americans economically and physically able to attend theatres make a habit of avoiding them. Amongst this potential audience of 25 millions are the thousands who would willingly go to see pictures of the calibre of Henry V, Brief Encounter, The Well-digger's Daughter, Les Enfants du Paradis, The Informer, The Long Voyage Home, or documentary films like The River and A Diary for Timothy. Experience has shown that the best way of handling such product in America is not necessarily to play it indiscriminately in the big houses, but to earmark definite neighbourhood theatres in the big cities, where sufficient support among the so-called 'upper crust' is forthcoming for the pictures to run weeks and sometimes months.*¹²² The ideal solution is to establish theatres of different character, some for Cocteau, others for Crosby,¹²² because in Britain, by a slow process unperceived in Wardour Street, audiences are sorting themselves into several layers of film-consciousness.⁵

Implicitly, it is acknowledged that the attempt to influence the mass cinema towards improved standards has failed. The renaissance of British films is deemed to have more or less passed, and mass cinema will fall back to its old pattern of monotonous entertainment with the occasional rare exception that the critic remarks upon enthusiastically. Such films are usually American, and pose problems for the distributors who bring them out as B-pictures. The critics can then rescue them from this ignominy, as indeed they did in Britain with *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, *The Window* and *They Live by Night*. Otherwise, quality is deemed to be elsewhere. The strategy becomes one of trying to encourage the development of an expanding circuit of specialised cinemas building on the film society movement, rather than trying to raise the standards of commercial cinema as a whole. *The Everyman [Hampstead] is a light in the window of the future, for there should be such cinemas in every large area, developing the single film society audience into the multiple audiences of the general public necessary to support a permanent cinema.*¹⁴³ The peculiar strategic importance of the specialised cinema resides in the fact that it is not simply a place where good films in foreign languages are shown, but that it is the ONLY channel through which creative and experimental work in the field of international film art is brought before the general public. It thereby performs a possibly slow, but certainly constant and cumulative work of improving public taste with regard to ALL films which come before it, and thus enables the commercial film producer to take for granted a rising level of public taste.¹⁴⁴

The retreat into the specialised cinema arena is the first of a series of mutations that were to overtake the discourse that I have traced. The decline in cinema attendance and the rise of television have effects that are indirect rather than direct: little in the way of direct speculation about the changes takes place. The major areas of change in the 1950's concern Hollywood and authorship. Two consolidations take place. The first is to extend the critical and ethical values of the quality film in more subtle ways to the Hollywood film. Thus part of the project of *Sequence* and its writers who moved to *Sight and Sound* (eg Gavin Lambert and the current editor Penelope Houston) was the evaluation of Hollywood genre films produced by recognised artists. Lindsay Anderson's work on Ford promotes *My Darling Clementine* for its humanism at the expense of *The Informer* and *The Long Voyage Home*. Humanism is consolidated in relation to Hollywood, but without its internationalist purpose. Internationalism was a defunct ideology in the days of the cold war.

The changes and consolidations in relation to authorship took place in two ways. The first was the development of the categorisation of specialised cinema films in terms of a set of known world authors: Bergman, Ray, Antonioni appear instead of the old categorisation of 'this sensitive film from Sweden/India/Italy'. The marketing advantages of such a representation are obvious; to the critic they offered the possibility of coming to terms with the increasing formal experimentation of art film directors without having to face the implications of this for their aesthetic. The formal difficulties were accounted for in terms of 'self-expression'. In such circumstances, the second mutation became possible, a development of a native auteur theory.

More recent developments seem to have been the erosion of a more general nature: the ideological bases of an overt humanism no longer exist in the way that the discourse of 1942-8 could assume. Instead the discourse of the 'quality film' has become more overtly aesthetic, the principle quality that is now stressed is that of experience for its own sake: an 'exquisite experience', a 'shattering experience'. Allied to this is the overturning of the conceptions of clarity that are implicit in the ideas of unity and realism. Instead of the assumption of clarity on the part of the film, we now have a situation where a film is more interesting because it is puzzling, because it does not have the kind of clarity which makes it self-evident at first viewing. Any work on the signifying processes of film is open to a constitution within the discourse of 'quality film' criticism in these terms: it is 'an experience', which is 'direct'; its 'meaning' is something that has to be puzzled over. Allied to the direct and personal nature of the experience is a stress on the sensual aspects of the film: the 'luxuriant visuals', the 'sumptuous sound-track'. These seem no

longer to be subservient to a wider design, an overall unity. This points perhaps to the way in which the subjectivity of the experiencing, witnessing audience has become the central term of the current version of the discourse of 'quality film', rather than an aesthetic of unity and reality based upon a proselytising humanism.

These remarks are offered as speculations about the way in which the terms used in 1948 and in 1978 are, though similar, constituted within rather different discursive organisations. The different organisations are the product of a process of transmutation: *unity/reality* can be transmuted into *experience/puzzle*. It must be emphasised that this is not a matter of a transformation of a given and closed system: the transmutation of the discourse takes place as a part of the transmutation of larger ideological significations, as well as a result of the internal uncertainties and instabilities of this particular discourse. It is this process that needs to be examined as a part of a political project of trying to exploit the discourse of 'art cinema' to further an independent cinema.

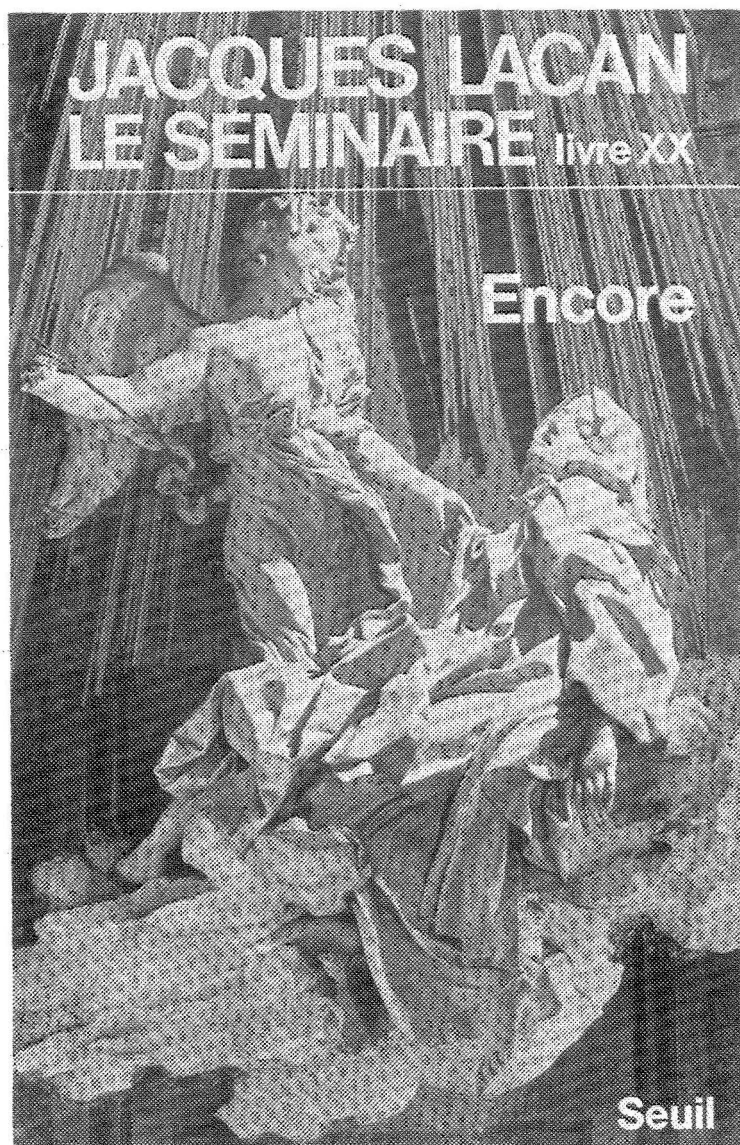
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Difference

Stephen Heath

I

From *Encore*, Lacan's 1972/73 seminar devoted to 'what Freud expressly left aside, the *Was will das Weib?*, the *What does woman want?*' (SXX, p75),¹ this passage on female pleasure, enjoyment, *jouissance*:

'... just as with Saint Teresa – you only have to go and look at the Bernini statue in Rome to understand immediately she's coming, no doubt about it. And what is she enjoying, coming from? It's clear that the essential testimony of the mystics is that of saying they experience it but know nothing about it. These mystical ejaculations are neither idle gossip nor mere verbiage, in fact they're the best thing you can read – note, right at the bottom of the page, *Add to them Jacques Lacan's Ecrits*, a work of the same order. Given which, naturally, you're all going to be convinced. I believe in God. I believe in the *jouissance* of the woman in so far as it is *en plus*, something more, on condition you block out that *more* until I've thoroughly explained it.'

(SXX, p70.)

Ignoring the habitual self-presentation (the famous style, which is indeed the insistence on the movement of psychoanalysis in its attention to the unconscious as against the simple determination of any concluded theorisation but which is also, and thereby, the construction of a formidable persona, Lacan the embodiment of a word always elusively ahead, Lacan the term of an irresolvable

¹ SXX – J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XX*, Paris 1975. Freud's question, *Was will das Weib?*, occurs in a letter to Marie Bonaparte: 'The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is "What does a woman want?"' cit E Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work* v2, London 1955, p468. One or two remarks need to be

52 transference), ignoring the assurance of the position of knowledge (they – Saint Teresa for example – feel, Lacan knows, in the conviction, carried by the theory, of a woman's incapacity to say anything of consequence regarding the reality of her experience: 'women do not know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me' (SXX, p68); even women analysts are disappointingly no better: 'since the time we've been begging them, begging them on our knees – I mentioned previously women analysts – to try to tell us, well, not a word! never been able to get anything out of them' (SXX, p69)), ignoring all this, what is striking in the passage is the certainty in a representation and its vision (the cover of the book of the seminar is provided by a full-page photograph of the sculpture). No doubt, not the trace of any difficulty, to see the Bernini statue is to understand at once, is to have one's gaze filled with Saint Teresa's coming, with the *jouissance* of the woman; the statue is adequate, the image it gives enough.

Yet who exactly is Lacan addressing? Men? Women? Whose is the certainty he assumes so easily ('you only have to')? The passage is indifferent to such questions, as is Lacan's work generally in the forms of its enunciation: the topic is so often sexual difference but the treatment of that topic has no incidence as the possibility of a problem of sexual difference across the subject of

made at the outset in connection with the discussion of psychoanalysis in what follows. The term 'psychoanalysis' will be used to refer to that area of investigation described and theorised as psychoanalysis in the – extensive – writings of Freud, Lacan and those close to the latter (as is well known, Lacan's work is intended as a 'return to Freud', as the effective elaboration of the implications of the 'science of unconscious mental processes' developed by Freud). Discussion and criticism are of aspects of that body of theoretical work, which is to say that the actual practice of psychoanalysis in its specific analytic situation is not here in question. A principle much stressed by Lacan is that 'the analyst is authorised from himself or herself', psychoanalysis exists and is learned, that is, in the analytic situation, cannot be contained, at best approached, in theoretical constructions (the unconscious is *radically* another scene), cannot be authorised by master or institution (the analyst is not the possessor of a diploma but the site of a listening attention in which he or she is constantly surprised, reimplicated). The problem must then arise of the status of psychoanalytic theory and of the teaching – the transmission – of psychoanalysis: Lacan is after all the Director of a School with grades, forms of authorisation, and the purveyor of a teaching which is a complex theoretical production (even, apparently, available for transmission in quasi-mathematical formulae, 'mathemes'). That problem itself, currently under debate, is of less concern here than the importance and influence, the effect, of psychoanalytic theory today – including in thinking about film and cinema – far beyond the specific practice of psychoanalysis. To criticise psychoanalysis in aspects of that theory is not, of course, to reject or refuse psychoanalysis, it is merely to treat the theory, and psychoanalysis with it, as non-homogeneous; to recognise the fundamental significance of Lacan's work, often built upon in *Screen*, is not to accept all its developments, positions, presentations.

the enunciation and the pattern of address of a discourse; of this discourse; the property of the discourse remains assured, assurance of the relation of Lacan to audience, the imaginary of the *evidence* of the statue. Thus any answer to the questions posed will be in terms of the identification of a discourse that is finally masculine, not because of some conception of theory as male but because in the last resort any discourse which fails to take account of the problem of sexual difference in its enunciation and address will be, within a patriarchal order, precisely indifferent, a reflection of male domination. It might be added, moreover, as a kind of working rule, that where a discourse appeals directly to an image, to an immediacy of seeing, as a point of its argument or demonstration, one can be sure that all difference is being elided, that the unity of some accepted vision is being reproduced.

The something more, the *en plus*, that Lacan sees so readily in the statue as the *jouissance* of the woman makes up for the something less, the absence, that the woman represents, represents in the first instance according to a scenario that is another certainty of seeing. Time and time again, Freud proposes the initiation of the castration complex in women, as it were, at sight: 'little girls . . . notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognise it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ'; 'A little girl behaves differently. She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it'; 'the little girl discovers her own deficiency from seeing a male genital'; etc.² As in the Lacan passage, seeing is understanding, only here it is the understanding of the lack, the condition of the more to which the woman will subsequently be returned by psychoanalysis; the woman sees and knows at once, in a flash, that she has nothing to see. The account effectively operates in a binding tourniquet in which the little girl resolves the hesitations of the little boy who 'when he first catches sight of a girl's genital region . . . begins by showing irresolution and lack of interest . . . he sees nothing or disavows what he has seen':³ the girl is given in analytic theory to know at once the nothing she sees, confirming in that certainty, the certainty of the analytic scenario that premisses the woman as the difference of the man, his term, the nothing to see that the boy is brought to know; the woman does represent the lack to see on her body, acknowledging, as little girl, visibility on the side of the man. Freud refers to the 'strikingly visible', Lacan to the phallus as

2 S Freud, 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* vXIX, p252; 'Female sexuality', *Standard Edition* vXXI, 1, 233.

3 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes', p252.

54 'something the symbolic use of which is possible because it can be seen, because it is erect; of what cannot be seen, of what is hidden, there is no possible symbolic use' (SII, p315).⁴ Naturally, given the perspective of visibility established, it is the sex of the woman that is taken as the very instance of the unseeable, the hidden: Freud records his belief that 'probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital';⁵ Lacan talks of 'the pre-eminently original object, the abyss of the female organ from which all life comes forth' (SII, p196).

The function of castration as the articulation of the subject in difference is brought down to a matter of sight, the articulation of the symbolic to a vision. Where the conception of the symbolic as movement and production of difference, as chain of signifiers in which the subject is effected in division, should forbid the notion of some presence from which difference is then derived; Lacan instates the visible as the condition of symbolic functioning, with the phallus the standard of the visibility required: seeing is from the male organ. The problem, moreover, is maintained, not eased, by the distinction between penis and phallus customarily asserted. The golden rule of Lacanian theory is 'to *detach* the phallus from the organ by which it *consists*',⁶ the phallus is a signifier, is not an object, not the penis, but the latter nevertheless is its consistence as symbol, the phallus is said to symbolise the penis which, strikingly visible, is the condition of the symbol; Lacan is often no further than the limits of pure analogical rationalisation in this respect: 'It can be said that this signifier [the phallus] is chosen because it is what stands out most in what can be grasped in the real of sexual copulation, and as being also the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is equivalent there to the (logical) copula. It can also be said that, by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation' (E, p692).⁷ The penis/phallus distinction-oscillation-relation is symptomatic: on the one hand, psychoanalysis points to the production of subject, unconscious, desire in the symbolic; on the other, it derives that production from the

4 SII - J Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre II*, Paris 1978.

5 S Freud, 'Fetishism', *Standard Edition* vXXI, p154.

6 Irène Diamantis, Michel Silvestre, 'Annonce d'un enseignement sur "Recherche sur la fonction phallique"', *Ornicar?* n8, p106.

7 E - J Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris 1966; trans *Écrits: A Selection*, London 1977, p287 (where the English selection includes an essay quoted here from the *Écrits*, reference will be given to the translation in a footnote, as in the present instance, though the wording of the translation may be modified). That Lacan then goes on to say that such statements still hide the fact that the phallus plays its role only when 'veiled', when 'the signifiable is raised to the function of signifier', changes nothing in the necessity nevertheless of the rationalisation, the logic of its appearance

fact of a perceived castration – the woman's lack – in a theory of infantile sexuality; the penis/phallus is the join of the two emphases, the 'privileged signifier of that mark in which the part of the logos comes together with the advent of desire' (E, p692)⁸ where the privilege can only be founded from a difference in nature *to be seen*; a recognition of lack is given outside of any signifying process as a fact of each individual subject with a return in the symbolic – the phallic function – that ties process to vision. What is at stake and shut off in the logic of the penis/phallus is the history of the subject in as far as that history might include effects of social organisation, and, for example, of patriarchal order. That such a logic may really describe the production of subjectivity in a relation of sexual difference in a patriarchal society is not necessarily in question; that production, however, cannot be inverted – except to reproduce and confirm its established terms – into the fixed point of an origin, the translation of a vision. The vision, any vision, is constructed, not given; appealing to its certainty, psychoanalysis can only repeat the ideological impasse of the natural, the mythical representation of things.

The woman who is there in psychoanalysis, whom it hears, is the hysteric. Hysteria, as is well enough known, has its importance as the very beginning of psychoanalysis: Freud attends Charcot's famous 'lessons' in the Salpêtrière, interests himself in Breuer's experience with Anna O and the 'talking cure', publishes with Breuer the *Studies on Hysteria* ('the starting point of psychoanalysis'), moves back, across the recognition of the importance of the sexual element, from the clinical definition of hysteria accomplished by Charcot to its understanding as a psychological disturbance now posed as an implication of the subject in specific unconscious mental processes; from compression of the ovaries to compression of the brain, the hand pressing on the patient's forehead, to the final analytic situation, only the contact of speech, association, interpretation. It is with the hysteric that psychoanalysis encounters symptom as meaning, the other scene that speaks across the body, a knowledge produced from the subject as effect: 'The hysteric produces knowledge. The hysteric is an effect, as every subject is an effect. The hysteric forces the "signifying matter" to confess, and thereby constitutes a discourse.'⁹ The discourse of hysteria is not just a beginning of psychoanalysis, it is, in its forcing of the signifying matter, a fundamental condition. When Lacan identifies four basic positions of discourse, that of the analyst is a quarter of a turn away from that of the hysteric

in the argument, merely enacts the golden rule: exactly the detaching – the 'raising' – of the phallus *from the penis*.

⁸ *Écrits: A Selection*, p287.

⁹ J Lacan, 'Conférence, Yale University 1975', *Scilicet* n6/7, p38.

56 which is its constant attention; analysis is said to be nothing other than the structural introduction of the discourse of the hysteric, the analyst is 'a perfect hysteric, that is, without symptoms'.¹⁰ This function of hysteria, the appeal to the discourse of the hysteric, is not as such implicated in any division based on sexual difference and it should be remembered that Charcot and Freud after him insisted on a reappropriation of the disturbance hysteria outside of its limitation as a female condition (Freud was ridiculed after a lecture to the Viennese Medical Society in 1886 in which he described cases of male hysteria, an old surgeon railed at such absurdity when everyone knew that hysteria was to do with the uterus). Yet, at the same time, hysteria constantly comes back to the woman: already in Freud (the *Studies on Hysteria* are all of women), today in psychoanalysis in the obligatory reference in analytic writing concerned with questions of the female to hysteria; the latter reference is so strong indeed that 'feminine' and 'hysterical' are taken as more or less interchangeable: 'so-called "hysterical" speech which ought rather to be called feminine'; after all, 'all women play on the uterus'¹¹ (stupefying, we are back with the Viennese Medical Society against Freud).

The success of Freud and psychoanalysis with female hysteria was an understanding of it as a problem of sexual identity in phallic terms: the hysteric is unsure as to being woman or man, 'the hysterical position – having or not having the phallus';¹² hers is a body in trouble with language, that forcing of the signifying matter, resisting and accepting simultaneously the given signs, the given order. Listening to the woman as hysteric, psychoanalysis opens and closes the other scene, with the point of closure exactly 'sexual identity', 'sexual difference'; hence, symptomatically, the curious lag of psychoanalysis felt by Freud with regard to femininity, women still the great enigma, the 'dark continent', which feeling gives rise in the twenties and thirties – after Freud's major work is accomplished – to the flurry of new interest and discussion (writings by Freud himself, de Groot, Deutsch, Horney, Jones, etc) – curious just because of that beginning with hysteria, the cures with women, the attention focused there. When Dora, subject of a case which is published in confirmation of the theses set out in the *Studies on Hysteria*,¹³ politely disappears from Freud's sight on the last day of 1900, interrupts her treatment, she breaks with a Freud, with an analysis,

10 J Lacan, Seminar 16 November 1976, *Ornicar?* n12/13, p12 ('without symptoms, except from time to time mistakes in gender' . . .).

11 Michèle Montrelay, *L'Ombre et le nom: sur la féminité*, Paris 1977, p28.

12 I. Diamantis, 'Recherches sur la féminité' *Ornicar?-Analytica* v5, p27.

13 S Freud, 'Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria', *Standard Edition* vVII, pp 3-122.

caught up in a logic of sexual identity and difference unable to envisage any other economy (thus unable, for example, to engage with what it could only anyway see as her 'homosexuality'). In every sense, psychoanalysis answered to the hysteria it realised as its initial and decisive object: what works is identity, the phallus, that difference, having or not, variations from there, with the woman as other, less and more, falling short and beyond; start from the hysteric, the problem of identity, focus centrally the term of identity with the male as measure, as standard ('we have been in the habit of taking as the subject of our investigations the male child'),¹⁴ come back to the woman as as yet, as always, unknown ('we need not feel ashamed')¹⁵ – the lag is produced by the logic, the woman can only be 'the woman', *different from*. For centuries, hysteria has named an incapacity to take that place, to be the difference, 'the woman'. To explain hysteria by the problem of sexual identity is to miss the struggle in female hysteria against *that* assumption of difference, against *that* identity, is to refind hysteria as a nature of women and not the site of a resistance – nothing to do with an essence – in culture.

In Charcot's clinical teaching practice at the Salpêtrière, the Tuesday lessons attended by Freud, attention was paid to the realisation of a photographic record of the cases presented, a veritable iconography of hysteria: 'we saw', write the compilers of the record, 'from M Charcot's example how considerable were the benefits to be had from representations of this kind'.¹⁶

Charcot's cases included men and children, the photographs are of women, plates interspersed within the text of the clinical details; often a portrait of the particular woman as she is at rest, the 'normal physiognomy', much like any other late nineteenth century portrait photograph, then the stages of the 'attack' so dear to Charcot in his endeavour to bring hysteria into the order of medicine, to define a clinical *picture*, the '*tableau clinique*'; very occasionally (as, for example, in volume I plate XVI), nurses intrude, by the side of the patient, fixing the camera, determinedly posing; now and then an effect of 'beauty', a young girl composed on her bed (volume I plate XVIII), something of Millais' *Ophelia*, 'terminal stage of the attack', no trace of disturbance, in her 'the delirium sometimes takes on a religious character' – the *aura* of hysteria, part of the picture. The interest for Charcot, and for the compilers, is in the stages, the step by step unfolding

14 S Freud, 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes', p249.

15 S Freud, 'The question of lay analysis', *Standard Edition* vXX, p212.

16 Bourneville, P Regnard, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière (Service de M Charcot)* 2 vols, Paris 1876-78 (the quotation is from the preface to volume I).

58 of the attack. Where others had seen only disorder, merely the random, Charcot saw order, a repeated pattern which the photographs must serve to give; hence the series of plates for a single patient, an attempt at duration, a movement in time. Plates XVII-XXV of volume II, for instance, are devoted to a sixteen year old girl in the throes of the period of delirium: the various 'passionate attitudes' are shown in sequence and named – attitudes of 'threat', 'appeal', 'amorous supplication', 'eroticism', 'ecstasy', 'hallucinations of hearing'. The effect is of a kind of cinema: the spacing of gestures in a succession of images, the holding of those same gestures to the clarity of a narrative meaning; one can imagine the *Salpêtrière Iconographie* as a catalogue of gestural signs for the use of performers in silent films – and such an imagination would not be too far from the spectacle of the lessons, which all the contemporary pictures and prints pick up: the excited audience, the master, the young woman in a series of pathetic scenes according to script (there is a certain controversy over the demonstrations and the repetitions of the stages of the attack: hypnotised by the master's zealous assistants, with pressure applied to their 'hysterogenic zones', was there any other part for these women?).

What is missing in the photographs is the voice, an absence signalled, as it were, in the naming of the 'hallucinations of hearing' plate; the absence of the speech across the body, in convulsion, delirious. The text restores a little of the voice, almost nothing: when a patient cries 'Mummy!', Charcot comments, 'You see how hysterics shout. Much ado about nothing. Epilepsy which is much more serious is much quieter'; when another is said by her mother to talk of 'someone with a beard, man or woman', the response is 'whether man or woman is not without importance, but let us slide over that mystery'. Charcot sees, Freud hears. All the cinema is banished, the spectacle gives way to the analytic situation (not quite all, something remains in the establishment of that situation, the couch, the analyst seated behind, which, says Freud, allowed me to see without being seen,¹⁷ a perfect definition of the position of the cinema spectator). Psychoanalysis is the anti-visible; significant in this respect, moreover, are Freud's distrust of projects for rendering analysis on the screen and, conversely, the powerful social desire to bring that same analysis into sight, the fascination of so many films with psychoanalysis. Hence no certainty in seeing, which comes back round to the paradox of such certainty nevertheless in Freud, in Lacan, to the terms of the difference it assumes and sustains.

17 S Freud, 'An autobiographical study', *Standard Edition* vXX, p28 ('seeing, but not seen myself').

The spectacle of the woman then, the more and the less of *Encore* with its Freudian question as to what woman wants; in the first instance, the main theses of Lacan's answer, how the question works:

(a) *There is no sexual relation*, this being the very reality of psychoanalysis: 'the only basis of analytic discourse is the statement that there is no – that it is impossible to pose – sexual relation' (SXX, p14). No sexual relation does not mean no relation to a sex; on the contrary, this latter relation is precisely what is at stake in the function of castration which is in fact the point of the absence of the former. The division of the subject in the symbolic, in the desire of the Other, is the impossibility of any unity of relation: 'in so far as it is sexual, *jouissance* is phallic, which is to say that it does not relate to the Other as such' (SXX, p14); 'the *jouissance* of the Other taken as a body is always inadequate' (SXX, p131). Male or female, the subject is implicated from and in the phallus, phallic *jouissance*, but differently: there is a male and a female way of failing relation. In other words, the structure of a subject is a division in the symbolic; that division is not the fact of some immediately given sexual difference, men and women are not complementary to one another, two halves that could be joined in union, both are produced in division; the phallus is the term of that production in as much as it functions as the signifier in the articulation of castration; male and female differ in consequence of the phallic function in castration, are in the position of a different relation to phallus and castration; thus there can be no sexual relation, only a relation to phallic *jouissance*, in the woman as in the man.

(b) *The woman is not-all*: 'the woman is defined from a position that I've noted as not-all in respect of phallic *jouissance*' (SXX, p13). The woman cannot really sustain phallic *jouissance*, her relation to the phallus as term of symbolic castration is lacking: 'in her body' she is 'not-all as sexed being', 'the sexed being of these women not-all passes not via the body but via what results from a logical requirement of discourse' (SXX, p15); 'the woman is not-all, there is always something with her which eludes discourse' (SXX, p34). The gist of this is that in as far as the phallus marks the turn of the symbolic representation of the sexual, the woman is not all – not quite, not whole, not completely – in that representation: she misses out on the phallus and misses in the discourse which it organises and which is the relay of her excess, her sexuality.

(c) *Everything revolves round phallic jouissance*. Sexual *jouissance* is phallic, *jouissance* – enjoyment, pleasure – of the organ; it is not a sexual relation, a relation to the Other as such. The order of the symbolic, the phallus being the privileged signifier of that order, causes and limits *jouissance*, the phallic being that limita-

60 tion, and for both men and women: the woman is caught up in *phallic jouissance* but not-all, there is 'something more', 'a supplementary *jouissance*' (SXX, pp68-69); the man sustains phallic *jouissance* which is then the obstacle that prevents him from really enjoying the body of the woman, what he has is 'the enjoyment of the organ' (SXX, p13). Thus, 'the enjoyment of the Other . . . is something else again, namely the not-all' (SXX, p26).

(d) *There is a jouissance beyond the phallus which is the jouissance of the woman.* 'When I say that the woman is not-all and that it is for that reason that I cannot say *the* woman, it is precisely because I am raising the question of a *jouissance* which in regard of everything which serves in the phallic function is of the order of the infinite' (SXX, p94).

(e) *The woman is that which relates to the Other.* Woman and Other, 'locus of the signifying cause of the subject' (E, p841), are not-all, more and less than the order of the phallus, radically other: 'The Other is not simply that locus of the stammering of truth . . . By her being in the sexual relation, in relation to what can be said of the unconscious, radically the Other, the woman is that which relates to the Other' (SXX, p75). Woman is equivalent to truth, 'at least for the man' (SXX, p108); the questions of the desire of the Other and the desire of the woman are one and the same, the question of the truth: '*What does woman want? - woman being on the occasion the equivalent of the truth*' (SXX, p115).

(f) *Thus (the jouissance of) the woman is (in the position of) God.* The Other is the only place left 'in which to put the term God' (SXX, p44). Since the Other 'must have some relation to what appears of the other sex' (SXX, p65), 'why not interpret a face of the Other, the God face, as supported by feminine *jouissance*?' (SXX, p71); 'it is in as much as her *jouissance* is radically other that the woman has more relation to God' (SXX, p77); in the *jouissance* of the woman one can mark that 'God has not yet made his exit' (SXX, p78).

'Nothing can be said of the woman' (SXX, p75), but Lacan in *Encore* does nothing but talk of the woman (concerned perhaps to give 'a real consistency to the Women's Movement' SXX, p69). True, at one level 'the woman' is emptied of any essence, produced in function of a symbolic order, but that function itself is universal, 'the woman part of speaking beings' (SXX, p74), and the woman everywhere returns in her common places - close to unconscious, Other, Truth, and God. To say that the 'the' of 'the woman', 'definite article designating the universal' (SXX, p68), is to be crossed out, barred through, is in no way to challenge the universalisation; indeed, it is its very renewal, another turn of the screw, the same discourse of the essence continues: 'there is no woman but excluded by the nature of things which

When psychoanalysis produces woman, the woman, as not-all, it falls short, remains locked in a static assignation. It is not the woman who is not-all but psychoanalysis, which is what the latter has been so generally unwilling to grasp. Psychoanalysis discovers and ceaselessly fails – in its theory – the unconscious, and that failure is history, the social relations of production, classes, sexes. It is not by chance that Lacan devotes a year's seminar to 'What does woman want?' – a seminar dotted with little references to women's struggle (of the kind: 'I was in Italy, there was a person who was furious, a lady from the local women's movement, she was really . . . so I said "Come back tomorrow morning, I'll explain what it's all about"' SXX, p54) – at the very time that 'the woman', as women, is intervening against the given relations, for social transformation, and with a political claim on psychoanalysis in the theoretical constructions and concepts it elaborates.

There is in Lacan's writing the presence of an unquestioned imaginary of the woman. When he expresses his enthusiastic liking for Benoît Jacquot's *L'Assassin musicien*, what strikes him, a bubbling fascination, is the little girl – a little girl is 'a virtual woman, hence a being much more engaged in the real than males' (SI, p187)¹⁸ – and above all her spontaneity, her naturalness, a real little girl.¹⁹ Somewhere, for Lacan, the woman is always the exact image of herself, contained such as she is, on the God face of the Other, infinitely unknowable, knowable only as the different, visibly, certainly that. Thus the image of Saint Teresa, the sureness of the religious representation, the woman held as the truth of that view. If that image fails, there is nothing left but the threat of castration, the abyss, the tearing vagina: 'Queen Victoria, there's a woman . . . when one encounters a toothed vagina of such exceptional size . . .'²⁰

III

Lacan's work is vastly more important than the positions he is led to develop, the worst stereotypes he grotesquely rejoins and repeats. That importance, the sense of the 'return to Freud', is the attention given to the constitution of the subject in the symbolic and the relation of the unconscious there, with questions of sexuality posed accordingly – Freud's discovery was not that of sexuality but of the unconscious as site of meaning. It is necessary now to try to take up something of that attention to the subject,

18 SI – J Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre I*, Paris 1975.

19 Cf J Lacan, 'Faire mouche', *Le Nouvel Observateur* n594, 29 March-4 April 1976, p64.

20 J Lacan, Seminar 11 February 1975, *Ornicar?* n4, p94.

62 under the theses of *Encore*, in connection with issues of sexual difference and with the problem of difference as division of sex.

For memory simply,²¹ a passage from one of Freud's last pieces of writing in which he summarises his thinking in a difficult area:

'We are faced here by the great enigma of the biological fact of the duality of the sexes: it is an ultimate fact for our knowledge, it defies every attempt to trace it back to something else. Psychoanalysis has contributed nothing to clearing up this problem, which clearly falls wholly within the province of biology. In mental life, we find only reflections of this great antithesis; and their interpretation is made more difficult by the fact, long suspected, that no individual is limited to the modes of reaction of a single sex . . . For distinguishing between male and female in mental life we make use of what is obviously an inadequate empirical and conventional equation: we call everything that is strong and active male, and everything that is weak and passive female.'²²

Biological fact and mental reflections are complicated in their relation on the individual, the psychical having an independence from the physical ('to a great extent independent'),²³ the biological development of sexuality accompanied by a psychological development which is the effective determination of an individual's sexuality. Both developments are concerned in the bisexual disposition of every individual; psychically, 'the reactions of human individuals of both sexes are of course made up of masculine and feminine traits'.²⁴ Thus, 'pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content';²⁵ which leaves the problem of definition intact, run back into an assumed necessity of the expression of the biological in the psychological, 'the morphological distinction is bound to find expression in differences of psychical development',²⁶ or resolved for better or worse by

21 Extended presentation of Freud's work as concerned here can be found in Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Harmondsworth 1974, and, extremely critically, in Luce Irigaray, *Speculum: de l'autre femme*, Paris 1974; a brief account, including discussion of Lacan, is Rosalind Coward, 'Rereading Freud: the making of the feminine', *Spare Rib*, May 1978, pp43-46.

22 S Freud, 'An outline of psychoanalysis', *Standard Edition* vXXIII, p188.

23 S Freud, 'The psychogenesis of a case of homosexuality in a woman', *Standard Edition* vXVIII, p154.

24 S Freud, 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes', p255.

25 *Ibid*, p258.

26 S Freud, 'The dissolution of the Oedipus complex', *Standard Edition* vXIX, p178.

‘an inadequate empirical and conventional equation’ that simply accepts a given representation of man and woman and, witness the reference to conventional *and* empirical, its given foundation-justification as nature. 63

Lacan comes back to the relation of sexuality in the symbolic constitution of the subject. Language is the condition of the unconscious,²⁷ which latter is a concept forged on the trace of what operates to constitute the subject. Caused in language, which is division and representation, the subject is taken up as such in an interminable movement of the signifier, the process of the symbolic, and in a structure of desire, the implication of the subject's experience of division, of lack, in language. Hence the importance of language for psychoanalysis as the site of its object, unconscious desire; to grasp language as the condition of the unconscious is to insist on desire in language and to make the subject the term of a constant construction and representation, outside of the expression of any unity, biological included. ‘Analytic discourse allows us to glimpse that it is through language that man is separated, blocked from everything concerning the sexual relation, and that it is thereby that he enters the real, more precisely that he is lacking in this real.’²⁸ There is no sexual relation because there is no one, no two together, man and woman given complementarily; language is and recounts ‘a division which constitutes the subject in relation to the Other not to any one, the Other as point of the distribution-circulation of signifiers within which the subject is produced in a structure of desire, ‘the desire of man is the desire of the Other’ (E, p693).²⁹ Desire passes through, is in relation to the Other, not through or to some ‘partner’, is a function of the subject in language in its implication of the unconscious: ‘The function of desire is a last residuum of the effect of the signifier in the subject’ (SXI, p141).³⁰

In order to advance a little further in this context, the following passage may be quoted in which Lacan refers sexuality in the subject to lack and goes on to specify the overlap of two lacks:

‘... what must be done, as man or as woman, the human being has always to learn entirely from the Other ...’

That it be the drive, the partial drive, that orientates the human being in the field of sexual fulfilment, that it be the partial drive

27 For a detailed exposition, see ‘Notes on suture’, *Screen* v18, n4, Winter 1977/8, pp48-56.

28 J Lacan, ‘Sur l'expérience de la passe’, *Ornicar?* n12/13, p120.

29 *Ecrits: A Selection*, p288.

30 *SXI* – J Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XI*, Paris 1973; trans *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, London 1977, p154 (reference to this English version will be given in a footnote as in the present instance, though the wording of the translation may be modified).

- 64 alone that is the representative in the psyche of the consequences of sexuality, there is the sign that sexuality is represented in the psyche by a relation of the subject that is deduced from something other than sexuality itself. Sexuality is established in the field of the subject by a path that is that of lack.

Two lacks overlap here. The first has to do with the central default around which turns the dialectic of the advent of the subject to its own being in the relation to the Other – by the fact that the subject depends on the signifier and that the signifier is first of all in the field of the Other. This lack takes up the other lack which is the real, initial lack, to be situated at the advent of the living being, that is, in the fact of sexed reproduction. The real lack is what the living being loses, of its portion of living, in reproducing itself through the way of sex. This lack is real because it relates to something real, namely, that the living being, by its being subject to sex, has fallen under the jurisdiction of individual death.' (SXI, p186.)³¹

Effectively, the passage reformulates the join of the biological and the psychological seen at issue in Freud. On the sexual hinge species, individual and subject, and the hinge is the overlap of the two lacks. The species exists through its individuals who are transitory in the function of its reproduction, the assurance of its continuation; hence 'the presence of sex in the living being is bound up with death' (SXI, p162).³² The individual exists as subject in the relations of the symbolic, the human being is a speaking subject, which is the condition of unconscious and desire, the articulation of sexuality for the individual as subject. The biological apparatus is returned – parasited (Lacan talks of phallic *jouissance* as 'something which parasites the sexual organs')³³ – by the production of the signifier, its representation of the subject, its process of the body. When Lacan stresses the fundamental role of drive, it is exactly as the point of this return (Freud introduced the concept of drive as 'lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical'):³⁴ 'sexuality comes into play only in the form of partial drives; the drive is precisely that montage by which sexuality participates in the psychical life' (SXI p160);³⁵ 'with regard to the instance of sexuality, all subjects are equal, from the child to the adult: their dealings are solely with what of sexuality passes in the networks of the constitution of subjectivity, in the networks of the signifier; sexuality is realised only through the operation of the drives in so far as they are partial drives,

31 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp204-205.

32 *Ibid*, p177.

33 J Lacan, 'Conférence, Yale University 1975', p41.

34 S Freud, 'Three essays on the theory of sexuality'. *Standard Edition* vVII, p168.

35 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p176.

partial with regard to the biological finality of sexuality' (SXI, p161).³⁶ Drives, then, are 'the echo on the body of the fact of language':³⁷ the frontier between 'the mental and the physical' across the individual is an overlap, joining and disjoining, the partiality of the return, the circuit, of drives out of line with the simple biological finality of sexuality, reproduction; in its subjectivity, caused by language, the individual is excessive with regard to that finality, with the terms of the excess being unconscious, desire, death. What is crucial, in other words, is not the relation between masculine and feminine but that between the living subject and its loss in the sexual cycle of reproduction; 'In this way I explain the essential affinity of every drive with the zone of death, and reconcile the two sides of drive – which at once gives the presence of sexuality in the unconscious and represents, in its essence, death' (SXI, p181).³⁸

It is in this perspective that sexuality is to be understood as the reality of the unconscious: sexuality is not a 'content' of the unconscious but a process, the process of desire – 'in our experience, sexual desire has nothing objectified about it' (SII, p263). The desire of the subject from its division in the field of the Other, in the symbolic, is the relation of sexuality for the individual subject; desire is that 'nodal point by which the pulsation of the unconscious is linked to sexual reality' (SXI, p141).³⁹ Thus it becomes difficult to establish a difference expressible as male unconscious/female unconscious (this is one aspect of Freud's conception of libido – the force of the presence of desire, the dynamic manifestation in mental life of sexual drive – as 'masculine': 'active' in both men and women): the unconscious is the fact of the division of the subject in the symbolic, not of the male from the female; the mechanisms of desire, the dialectic of subject and object, fully engage the bisexual disposition of the individual. Yet to indicate that difficulty is not to suggest a simple indifference, it is to stress only that difference must be specified in respect of the division in the symbolic, of the history of the subject. In psychoanalysis, such specification depends on the phallus, the privileged signifier; the variety of mental structures that over-run the anatomical difference of the sexes has nevertheless a fixed reference, phallic sexual difference.

The joining-disjoining overlap of the biological by the mental as the turn of the subject allows a quite radical conception of sexuality, allows the possibility of a quite other posing of difference. Sexuality is not given in nature but produced; the individual subject is not constructed from sexuality, sexuality is constructed in

36 *Ibid*, pp176-177.

37 J Lacan, Seminar 18 November 1975, *Ornicar?* n6, p8.

38 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p199.

39 *Ibid*, p154.

66 the history of the subject, with difference a function of that construction not its cause, a function which is not necessarily single (on the contrary) and which, *a fortiori*, is not necessarily the holding of that difference to anatomical difference (phallic singularity). Production, construction in the history of the subject, sexuality engages also from the beginning, and thereby, the social relations of production, classes, sexes – an engagement which cannot be, the lesson of psychoanalysis, a reduction but which equally, the lesson of the limiting certainties of psychoanalysis against the effective implications of its theory, cannot be left aside, for later, beyond the enclosure of an analytically defined area.

An example in this context, fairly small but significant. Exploring the idea of the sexual reality of the unconscious, Lacan speculates, with a panoply of supporting references to the study of mitosis, the maturation of sexual cells, chromosomes, and so on, that 'it is through sexual reality that the signifier came into the world' (SXI, p138).⁴⁰ If that speculation is accepted, then the effect, contrary to the fundamental emphases of the psychoanalytic theory developed by Lacan, is to make sexual reality the condition of the symbolic, hence of the unconscious – of which it is thus, finally, as original sexual 'reality', the content. Lacan is close here to Freud's laying down of arms before the ultimate reality of the great enigma of the biological fact of the duality of the sexes (note in both Freud and Lacan the appeal beyond psychoanalysis, to science, the answer that must lie within the province of biology). In the theory, there is no place for sexual reality as foundation, as nature; the reality of sexuality is bound up with the reality of the symbolic construction of the subject – what returns is a history, unconscious desire, not the expression of an origin. That Lacan can nevertheless countenance the idea of the latter, can run analysis back into biology and myth, is symptomatic. The constant limit of the theory is the phallus, the phallic function, and the theorisation of that limit is constantly eluded, held off, and, for example, by collapsing castration into a scenario of vision; to say that it is through sexual reality that the signifier comes into the world is not far from deriving the phallus as privileged signifier from an essence in nature and not from an order of the symbolic – but then the problem, the debate, is precisely there.

IV

It is that problem, that debate, that will now be of concern in connection with the production of sexuality and the question of difference. The body is worked over in the symbolic, is sexed from its passage there, articulation of castration, moment of lack, drama of the subject. The phallus is given as the signifier of lack and the

40 *Ibid*, p151.

measure of desire, the veritable function of the symbolic: 'the phallus . . . is the signifier of the very loss the subject suffers by the fragmentation of the signifier' (E, p715); 'the phallus . . . is the signifier destined to designate the whole set of effects of signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as signifier' (E, p690);⁴¹ the phallus, in fact, is thus what *makes exchange* (of subject, language, body). The site of castration is the body of the mother, with the father possessor and figure of the phallus, guarantor of the order of the symbolic; 'it is when the father is deficient in one way or another (dead, absent, blind even) that the most serious neuroses are produced'.⁴² Mother and infant are two, that is, one, the imaginary possibility of a unity; the third, the father, makes two, assures the phallus as term of division in each individual subject; never the complementarity of two subjects, the division between them, but always the drama of the subject in the field of the Other, the experience of its lack-in-being, its being from lack, the lack of which the phallus is the signifier, inscribing its effects in the unconscious, in the gap between enunciation and enounced, a logic of the subject in the symbolic. That logic is then specified as a dialectic of being and having in which male and female positions can be distinguished: 'One can, simply by reference to the function of the phallus, indicate the structures that will govern the relations between the sexes. Let us say that these relations will turn around a being and a having . . . with regard to a signifier, the phallus . . .' (E, p694).⁴³ Man and woman are not together in a sexual relation but each separate in the relation of phallic *jouissance*: the man invests the woman as being the phallus, giving what she does not have, denies the function of castration; the woman invests the man as having the phallus, wishing to be the phallus for him, desiring his castration. In short, the phallus as privileged signifier, the constant and final meaning of symbolic exchange, for men and for women.

For men and for women . . . On the side of the woman, the passage from being to having is none too strong; the difference, 'the other sex' (SXX, p65), woman must be distinguished *from* man in psychoanalytic theory. Distinguished in 'her specific function in the symbolic order' (SII, p305), a position 'with no issue' (SII, p304), 'a relation of second degree to the symbolic order'

41 *Ecrits: A Selection*, p285.

42 J Lacan, in discussion Société Psychanalytique de Paris, *Revue Française de psychanalyse* April-June 1949, p317.

43 *Ecrits: A Selection*, p289. The dialectic of having and being is suggested in a late note by Freud: "'Having" and "being" in children. Children like expressing an object-relation by an identification: "I am the object". "Having" is the later of the two; after loss of the object it relapses into "being" . . .' note 12 July 1938, *Standard Edition* vXXIII, p299.

68 (SII, p305), which is why man is God incarnate for her, the second sex indeed, though of course there are conflicts, eternal conflicts – ‘the feminine revolt doesn’t date from yesterday’ (SII, p305). No illusions are permitted when Lacan returns to the question in the *Encore* seminar: ‘There is no woman but excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words, and it has to be said that if there is one thing about which women themselves are complaining at the moment, it’s well and truly that – it’s just that they don’t know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me’ (SXX, p68).

This is the context of notions of woman’s negative relation to the symbolic: the woman is lacking in respect of the phallus, of castration; in Cixous’s formula, ‘what analysis signals as marking woman is that she lacks lack’.⁴⁴ How then do these notions work in analytic theory, what does the latter make of the woman?

Take, as example, the account given by a member of Lacan’s *Ecole Freudienne*, the analyst Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni.⁴⁵ Both man and woman are subject to a regime of lack which produces between them a specific differentiation, locatable in the dialectic of being and having: ‘they are distinguished immediately by the direction taken by lack of being in the man from having: the man sticks with having in consequence of his having a penis; the woman sticks with the lack in being, having or not having remaining for her in the realm of the imaginary’.⁴⁶ In other words, woman fails symbolic castration which catches up in her, problematically, an imaginary partition (in the sense of a dividing up, a separating out) that is specifically feminine. Woman’s order is that of the double: duality of sexual organs (clitoris, vagina), duality of the relation to the mother (the woman is of the same sex as the parent who bears her), duality in her doubling-loss of herself as one (menstruation, childbirth). Divided up in this order of the double, the woman experiences the symbolic castration from a site elsewhere to the man: the penis has never been a part of her, the ‘you are not the phallus’ of castration with its process of being and having accords differently, difficultly for her; she passes from loss of an imaginary part of herself – the doubling, the partition – to loss of an organ that can only be a superimposition on that other loss which it then continues to figure (so, for instance, ‘when she comes to make love, the detumescence and withdrawal of the penis quite naturally figure and summarise – pending the future act of giving birth – all these losses’):⁴⁷ hence, ‘rather than castration anxiety the woman

44 Hélène Cixous, ‘Le sexe ou la tête?’, *Les Cahiers du GRIF* n13, October 1976, p8.

45 *Partage des femmes*, Paris 1976.

46 *Ibid*, p9.

47 *Ibid*, p82.

knows the anxiety of partition; she lives truly under the sign of abandonment: mother, father, children, husband, penis, everybody leaves her'.⁴⁸ The mechanism of the superimposition, the join of partition and castration, is identification, identification with the man (which is where the equation of woman and hysteric emerges, woman defined as a problem of identity): 'Through identification with the man, the woman imagines herself a lacking penis (whereas strictly speaking it is not lacking in the man) and symbolises in this way the lack of which all the phenomena of partition deprive her. Thus she moves from the imaginary loss of a half of herself to the imaginary loss of the male sexual organ, then to the symbolisable loss of a sexual organ, no matter which; provided, however, that "penis envy" does not fix her to the real absence of the particular sexual organ, the penis. But whose penis? Is the consequent castration symbolic or only imaginary, as a result of the fact that the penis has never been there, on the woman? Her own sexual organ is not threatened. Another process of specifically feminine symbolisation necessarily intervenes here, in the course of which the woman takes herself as lost object and stake of the symbolisation. To lose the half of oneself is indeed to lose oneself in one's unity and thus in one's being. The symbol of the lost unity would be the body as whole, without fissure.'⁴⁹ The woman is caught up in the symbolic and the phallic function as its articulation – contaminated, 'the moment of the contamination via the man of the fear of losing the penis (which becomes in her the feeling of never having had it)'⁵⁰ – but one cannot say the woman is really achieved in symbolic castration, there is only 'superimposition', 'substitution', 'transplantation', 'only imaginary castration'.⁵¹ Hence, coming back to being and having, the so-to-speak logical difference of man and woman: 'The man is one, by the grace of the signifier of his lack, the phallus, which happens to be the symbol of his sexual organ, the penis, which happens to be the organ through which passes and manifests itself his desire for the woman, the instrument which organises his libido. His *jouissance* is to find in the woman the Other and also, a little, knowing and having. But this knowledge does not divide him. The man is and remains, as man, and assuming that he exists as a man who is not also a woman, one. The *jouissance* of the woman is the revelation of this one in the Other, which makes her one for the duration of love. But being one makes her Other and separates her from her "mother body", like bark from a tree.'⁵² Less than one and lost from one, failing castration, 'badly

48 *Ibid*, p71.

49 *Ibid*, p84.

50 *Ibid*, p100.

51 *Ibid*, p100.

52 *Ibid*, p9.

70 castrated',⁵³ the woman can only invoke the man as 'the very ideal of unity',⁵⁴ the ideal that she is not, namely one. If she becomes one, in love, in the relation of phallic *jouissance*, she is thereby alienated once again, alienated from her specificity, the Other for herself as she is for the man – which, given the fixed point of the relation of phallic *jouissance*, amounts to defining this alienation as her effective specificity: 'no sexual revolution will shift these lines of division'.⁵⁵

It is true that no sexual revolution will shift dividing lines, the problem is one of social revolution. Privileging the sexual has nothing necessarily liberating about it; on the contrary, the sexual functions only too readily as an instance by development of and reference to which the social guarantees its order outside of any real process of transformation, produces exactly a containing ideology of 'liberation'. It is much the same story as with the inclusion in the theory of the possibility of the idea that 'it is through sexual reality that the signifier came into the world'. Hold to such an idea and difference will easily return as nature, not within the terms of a symbolic production; which is what patriarchy has always asserted, pinning women down to their sex, to a sex: the woman as the difference in nature. The political question is the avoidance of any collapse into that difference (which is to deny any difference, to accept the term of the given order, the interminable same of the phallus). A question, for example, of what from the perspective of that given order can appear as a radical desexualisation, and which is nothing other than the reposing of sexuality in its symbolic and social production. Paradoxically perhaps at first view, this may well be one of the decisive aspects of the insistence as to the extensiveness of women's sexuality: 'the woman has sexes all over';⁵⁶ 'is not the "adult" woman one who reconstructs her sexuality in a field which goes beyond sex'.⁵⁷ Which is to say that in current ideological struggle it is not enough to assert in opposition women's relation to a non-genital, 'dispersed' sexuality, since such an emphasis (moreover close to Freud, who can talk of a feminine sexuality 'dispersed over the body from head to foot')⁵⁸ is a powerful represen-

53 *Ibid.*, p72.

54 *Ibid.*, p8.

55 *Ibid.*, p9. Cf Moustapha Safouan (again an analyst-member of Lacan's School): 'finally the woman finds her being not as woman but as phallus, which is the sense of the fundamental alienation of her being', *La Sexualité féminine*, Paris 1976, p137.

56 Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris 1977, p28.

57 M Montrelay, *op cit*, p72; the chapter of Montrelay's book from which this quotation comes has been translated in English as 'Inquiry into femininity', *m/f* n1 1978 (quotation p94).

58 S Freud, 'Psychoanalytic notes on an autobiographical account of a case of paranoia', *Standard Edition* vXII, p33.

tation of woman from within, and as part of, the existing oppression, woman as a kind of total equivalent of sex, her identity there; the need is precisely to come back on the production of sexuality, women and men (the reduction of sexuality to genitality in their representation), and to understand the history of the subject in difference from there, in the social relations of its symbolic order, in a possibility of transformation.

When Lemoine-Luccioni says that 'no sexual revolution will shift the lines of division', she is not there, she remains within the restricted field of psychoanalysis, a theory which so often assumes that restriction as end, as grasp of the universal ('the man will always . . . the woman will always . . .');⁵⁹ she remains in that context in which, as regards politics, Lacan simply declares that he does not believe in progress;⁶⁰ which, of course, can be provided with a positive gloss, heard as a criticism of evolutionist versions of history, but which functions finally as a fact of analysis: no progress, only the truth, the truth of the impossibility of progress, fundamental change, the conversion of history into that truth. With Lemoine-Luccioni's book, one is left with a strong theoretical construction which takes direct account of a problem of difference, which continually exceeds the logic of the sole phallus (the whole of the counterpointing development of the idea of partition works in this excess), but which never poses the problem of the very concept of difference and the conception of difference assumed, the phallus thus remaining the constant and universalising reference, giving its form to that which is proposed as the different (partition as difference from the phallic constitution of the subject). This is the problematic of psychoanalysis, its problem, the problem of its history: the history it envisages in its account of the construction of the subject; the history of the situation of that account, the historical terms of its descriptions, descriptions which may adequately hold for the given social order without the adequacy necessarily implying the translation of their terms into absolute ones, adequate to every social historical realisation of the construction of the subject, the specific and properly 'absolute' area of psychoanalysis. To follow through now one or two points in Lemoine-Luccioni's characterisation of the woman in respect of the symbolic is to make evident something of that problematic – and is to find issues that are typical and important in current debate, issues that are important also, with resonances for, thinking about cinema.

If the woman is in some sort failing with regard to symbolic castration, then she fails equally with regard to the repression

⁵⁹ E Lemoine-Luccioni, *op cit*, p9.

⁶⁰ Cf eg 'Entretien avec des étudiants', Yale University 24 November 1975, *Scilicet* n6/7, p37.

72 which accompanies the constitution of the unconscious. Taking up this common thesis, Lemoine-Luccioni refers to the powerful version of it given by Michèle Montrelay: 'the sexuality of the woman is capable of remaining apart from all repression';⁶¹ female sexuality is censored rather than repressed, in as much as it 'lends itself less easily to a "losing itself" as the stake of unconscious representation';⁶² in as much, that is, as castration is difficult, the phallus a 'superimposition' in Lemoine-Luccioni's term. We come back here to that closeness of woman and unconscious of which Lacan talks in the *Encore* seminar; the positions may vary, but within the limits of the shared notion of closeness which depends on the function of the phallus. Lacan stresses the proximity of the woman to the Other (and God), in the sexual relation she is 'in relation to what can be said of the unconscious, radically the Other' (SXX, p75); from this proximity, either she is the unconscious for the man, 'it is only from where the man sees her that the dear woman can have an unconscious' (SXX, p90), or, for herself, she is the term of an unconscious which is simply unspeakable, 'she has unconscious effects, but as for her unconscious . . . what can be said of it? - if not to hold with Freud that it is not to her advantage' (SXX, pp90-91). For Montrelay, the woman pulls towards the unrepresentable, towards the ruin of representation, feminine sexuality is 'unexplorable';⁶³ a dark continent 'outside the circuit of the symbolic economy'⁶⁴ which the woman's *jouissance* contains and exceeds as an end of language, 'feminine *jouissance* of which nothing can be said, exceeding all meaning, contains by its very "madness" the symbolic order';⁶⁵ thus, 'to the extent that it does not know repression, femininity is the downfall of interpretation';⁶⁶ is as something of a time 'when the body and the world were confounded in one chaotic intimacy which was too present, too immediate'.⁶⁷ Lemoine-Luccioni is in general agreement but differs with regard to the consequent availability of women for analysis: femininity may be ruin and downfall of representation and interpretation yet 'the woman does hear voices, which speaks well, a tongue of gold, for psychoanalysis'.⁶⁸ Safouan finds himself able to accept Montrelay's thesis in as much as 'the woman's *jouissance* is obtained at a cheaper price, not requiring as exhaustive a liquidation of phallicism or the castration complex as in the case of the man' and

61 Montrelay, *op cit*, p68; 'Inquiry into femininity', p90 (translation modified); cf Lemoine-Luccioni, *op cit*, p58.

62 Montrelay, *op cit*, p67; 'Inquiry into femininity', p90.

63 *Ibid*, p66; 'Inquiry into femininity', p89.

64 *Ibid*, p67; 'Inquiry into femininity', p90.

65 *Ibid*, pp143-144.

66 *Ibid*, p66; 'Inquiry into femininity', p89.

67 *Ibid*, p64; 'Inquiry into femininity', p88.

68 Lemoine-Luccioni, *op cit*, p60.

indicates a 'relative ease of women in their relations to the unconscious'.⁶⁹ 73

The danger in all this is that it matches perfectly with the historical positions of patriarchal society in which 'woman' has been constantly identified as a locus of dis-order and women held to the forms of oppression constructed and justified in its terms (the oppression including, of course, the 'values' derived from that identification). Woman as sphinx, confronting Oedipus and the Oedipus, is never far away, the eternal feminine which menaces the subject, male and female, and to which women are constantly close. Montrelay, for example, introduces the sphinx into her inquiry into femininity as follows: 'To what does it refer, this reasoning and devouring hybrid being, which beats its wings as it talks? Why does this monster, a woman with the body of a beast, take up its place at the gates of Thebes? Does not the encounter with this enigmatic figure of femininity threaten every subject? Is it not she who is at the root of the ruin of representation?'⁷⁰ The line in the figure of the sphinx-woman between the posing of a question and the idea that women are the question is very thin;⁷¹ female sexuality is dark and unexplorable, women, as Freud put it, are that half of the audience which is the enigma, the great enigma.⁷² This is the problem and the difficulty – the area of debate and criticism – of Mulvey and Wollen's film *Riddles of the Sphinx*⁷³ where the sphinx is produced as a point of resistance that seems nevertheless to repeat, in its very terms, the relations of women made within patriarchy, their representation in the conjunction of such elements as motherhood as mystery, the unconscious, a voice that speaks far off from the past through dream or forgotten language. The film is as though poised on the edge of a politics of the unconscious, of the imagination of a politics of the unconscious ('what would the politics of the unconscious be like?').⁷⁴ with a simultaneous falling short, that politics and imagination not yet there, coming back with old definitions, the given images. It is not necessarily reactionary, finally reconfirming, to pose a connection between unconscious and women via a conception of a censored area of the feminine provided that, in so doing, the informing idea of the unconscious and its symbolic order is not a simple abstraction from the historical; to accept that uncon-

69 Safouan, *op cit*, p132.

70 Montrelay, *op cit*, p66; 'Inquiry into femininity', p89.

71 The formulation here is borrowed from an unpublished paper by Judith Williamson, 'Two or three things we know about ourselves', London 1977.

72 S Freud, 'New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis', *Standard Edition* vXXII, p113 ('those of you who are women . . . you are yourselves the problem').

73 Script published in *Screen* v18 n2, Summer 1977, pp61-77.

74 *Riddles of the Sphinx*, script, p69.

74 scious, symbolic are constitutive in the determination of human subjects is not at all to regard those functions as outside of historical determinations. If a sexual reality is the condition of the symbolic, that through which the signifier comes into the world, then there is little to do, nature wins; if sexuality is always a symbolic production, then there is a place for a politics of the unconscious, for, that is, a grasp of the unconscious not as closed but as historically open, taken up in the historical process of its realisations, existing in transformation. The equation of woman and unconscious leads only to essence; the raising of questions as to the operation of an equation between the feminine and the unconscious as assignment of a place of woman and its complex effects with regard to resistance from that place within a history and economy of repression is a fully political task. It is the task engaged, for example, by the work of Irigaray (fashionably scorned *in toto* in certain analytic circles),⁷⁵ work again on that edge of *Riddles of the Sphinx*; its force the consideration of the links between current designations of the unconscious and the definition of the feminine, of the traces to be followed in those links of different logics, different economies. Of course, the edge, she risks thereby the commonplace, the return, echoingly, mirroringly, of the defined area of the feminine for the given order, of a simple inversion of values, negative to positive. But the force remains in the risk, more than the woman-and-unconscious equation for which Irigaray, and *Riddles*, are so often criticised and rejected, remains, for instance, in the position taken in a passage such as the following, and with importance again for the Mulvey and Wollen film:

“ “ Can I sketch out something of the content of what this other unconscious, woman’s unconscious, would be? ” No, of course not, since that supposes detaching the feminine from the present economy of the unconscious. It would be to anticipate a certain historical process and check its interpretation and movement by prescribing, as from now, themes and contents to the feminine unconscious. I could say, however, that there is something that has been singularly ignored, scarcely broached, in the theory of the unconscious: *the relation of the woman to the mother and the relation of women amongst themselves*. But would this, for all that, be a sketch of the “ content ” of the “ feminine ” unconscious? No. It is merely a question addressed to the way in which the functioning of the unconscious is interpreted. Why are psychoanalytic theory and practice so far so poor and reductive as regards those matters? Can the latter find a better interpretation in a patriarchal-type economy and logic? In the

75 In 1974 Irigaray was suspended from her teaching in the Lacanian psychoanalysis department of the Université de Paris VIII (Vincennes).

A further issue arising is that of a determination by the problematic situation in the symbolic of a specific relation of woman and imaginary. Irigaray herself, often effectively thematically substantialising her question of the unconscious and the feminine and indeed running the feminine back into an anatomically mimetic expression of the body, stresses the 'rejection', the 'exclusion' of a feminine imaginary, a particular unfolding of woman's desire.⁷⁷ More generally, the idea of the woman's negative position in the symbolic order leads to emphasis on 'her privileged relation to the imaginary dyad, she is bound to the principle of reversibility which it contains',⁷⁸ where the imaginary is a site of reference to the pre-Oedipal bond of daughter-mother (remember Lemoine-Luccioni's focus on the doubling of woman, mother and child): 'the imaginary also contains the realm of pre-Oedipality to which the sexuality of the woman is bound . . . a repressed reference to the pre-Oedipal relation between the mother and the girl-child'.⁷⁹ In this form, the argument is in keeping with the view developed by Freud, the very term 'pre-Oedipus phase' being introduced in the context of his late considerations of female sexuality and hinging on the surprise at the importance and intensity of the original attachment of girl to mother ('our insight into this early, pre-Oedipus, phase in girls comes to us as a surprise, like the discovery in another field of the Minoan-Mycenaean civilisation behind the civilisation of Greece').⁸⁰ The modern argument takes up the differentiation of men and women in terms of the significance of the pre-Oedipal ('the phase of exclusive attachment to the mother, which may be called the pre-Oedipus phase, possesses a far greater importance in women than it can have in men; many phenomena of female sexual life which were not properly understood before can be fully explained by reference to this phase')⁸¹ and values the latter as difference, a specificity of the woman (no value is attributed by Freud to the strength of the pre-Oedipus phase; on the contrary, a major factor in the length and circuitousness of the path to the feminine form of the Oedipus complex which is all too often not surmounted at all, it marks the woman out as in some sense unfinished, apt for regression, slightly archaic). Montrelay offers a powerful development of this argument through her conception of a feminine primary imaginary, the woman confronted always on her own body with the original enjoyment of the

76 Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, pp123-124.

77 *Ibid*, p29.

78 Jacqueline Rose, 'Paranoia and the film system', *Screen* v17 n4, Winter 1976/77, p102.

79 *Ibid*, p102.

80 S Freud, 'Female sexuality', p226.

81 *Ibid*, p230.

76 mother, doubled in that: 'For the woman enjoys her body as she would the body of another. Every occurrence of a sexual kind (puberty, erotic experiences, maternity, etc) *happens to her* as if it came from a feminine other; every occurrence is the fascinating actualisation of *the femininity* of all women, but also and above all, of that of the mother. It is as if 'to become a woman', 'to be woman' gave access to a *jouissance* of the body as feminine *and/or* maternal. In the self-love she bears herself, the woman cannot differentiate her own body from that which was "the first object"',⁸² What is then needed is the rediscovery, the revaluation of that body of the imaginary: 'Can we not ask ourselves whether the imaginary, by giving "consistency" (as Lacan puts it) to the symbolic which is a gap, is not just as operative, just as determining of the structure as are the real and the symbolic? Giving consistency, giving body to the symbolic dividing up: that operation precedes any possible grasp of the subject in its image and that of the other. A primary imaginary exists which is not without its relation with feminine *jouissance*'.⁸³

The movement that links feminine and imaginary and understands a specificity of and for women from there brings with it, again, problems of the foundation of difference. To define a difference on the basis of this imaginary, taken as specific value, with characteristic effects of stressed relations between woman and narcissism, regression, and so on, can seem very quickly to repeat a definition maintained in the existing order, whose own imaginary, and imagery, of the woman is heavily implicated in attributions of defining narcissism (woman and the mirror . . .). *Riddles of the Sphinx* has its difficulty here too. Mulvey indicates that she 'wanted to set up narcissism and a sense of the female as something quite strong in opposition to the Oedipus complex';⁸⁴ the place of the sense of the female is taken from within the terms of the given structure, a point of resistance that is also a point of oppression, and something of the accepted imaginary comes back, the old images, the room full of mirrors in which the women are shut in dreams, something of the habitual cinema returns.

The habitual cinema . . . Cinema itself is never far away, is there on the horizon. The aim is a new place, 'this side of the specular image'; but the evocation of 'her' femininity attracts all femininity 'into the brilliance of an image';⁸⁵ the order of the double is always close to an imagery, an imaging. Failing the symbolic, outside of representation, it is difficult then not to reproduce the woman as site of the specular, the enclosed reversibility of specularity, a cinema for the man and for herself; and it is not by

82 Montrelay, *op cit*, p69; 'Inquiry into femininity', p91.

83 *Ibid*, pp155-156.

84 'Women and representation: a discussion with Laura Mulvey', *Wedge* n2, Spring 1978, p51.

85 Montrelay, *op cit*, p163.

chance that Montrelay can refer to the evidence of films: to 77
 Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits*, for example, a film which 'brings out
 the presence of the "dark continent" so well'.⁸⁶ The woman
 once more in sight, in her fascinating and fascinated duality – 'I
 saw myself seeing myself . . . assuredly this statement has its
 rich and complex implications when what is in question is the
 theme developed in [Valéry's poem] "La Jeune Parque", the theme
 of femininity . . .' (SXI, p76).⁸⁷

Perhaps it could be added here, a little aside, that the imaginary
 and the specular are not, as is too commonly thought, a simple
 equivalence; the latter – reflections, mirrorings, imagings – is part
 of the former but does not exhaust it. The analytic account of
 the construction of the subject is not one of a simple progression
 from imaginary to symbolic. True, Lacan sets the imaginary very
 precisely in the biographical moment of the mirror stage, but
 that is not to make it in any sense original, primary: symbolic,
real are always there; the subject is a representation of the signi-
 fier held in a structuration which is the shifting imbrication –
 the knotting – of real, symbolic and imaginary, the latter modelling
 desire in the subject's image of itself from the structure, not some
 separate area prior to the subject that it is given in some way to
 possess. If imaginary and specular are taken as equivalent, the
 conception of the imaginary slides easily towards such a priority,
 the area to be repossessed, a separate enclosure; where the need
 is much rather to avoid limiting the imaginary to a biographical
 evolution of the individual, to grasp that it is a necessary and per-
 manent function of the history of the subject, and, simultane-
 ously, of the subject in history. It can then no longer be a question
 of 'rediscovering' (nor, conversely, of 'abandoning'), but one
 of displacing, transforming. It might be said, to add to the addi-
 tion, that the play on the equivalence/disextensiveness of specular
 and imaginary as regards the history of the subject is a major
 factor in the force of cinema's ideological effects.

The preceding addition is finally not so intrusive since the one
 thing that has been constantly stressed here is that if there is a
 way of thinking that works in the specular-imaginary, it is well
 and truly that of difference – the establishment of the difference of
 one and the other sides from the fact of the biological division of
 the sexes, with its consequent motion of reversal of images, from
 side to side, the same images. Difference in these terms is always
 treacherous, reactionary; a tourniquet operates in which the real
 necessity to claim difference binds back, and precisely from the
 difference claimed, into the renewal of the same, a reflection of

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p71; 'Inquiry into femininity', p92.

⁸⁷ *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p80.

78 the place assigned, assigned as difference. Patriarchy, men in its order, has never said anything but that women are – the woman is – different: they are not *men*, the difference maintained supports the status quo, the difference derived, derived ideologically, from nature, the appeal to the biological, 'undeniable'. The problem, for men as for women, is to pose specificity away from the specularity of difference; which means a critical attention to the certainties of difference, the certainty of the phallus, proposed in and from psychoanalysis itself.

V

'There is no woman but excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words . . .' (SXX, p68). A Howard Hawks film, *Ball of Fire*, shows a gathering of lexicographers, amongst them Gary Cooper as Bertram Potts, troubled by a night-club dancer, Barbara Stanwyck as Linda 'Sugarpuss' O'Shea: they have the words, the law of the word; she has the body, is less, falling short of their law, and more, the excess she brings. Lacan and Hawks share the same view; we are back with the analysis of the failing of woman's relation in the symbolic order.

That analysis can then suggest the possibility of a specifically feminine practice of language in writing, where writing is understood in a modern perspective as an activity of transgression, breaking with the fixed positions of language, opening out a moving tissue of meanings. The problem of difference and specificity is importantly posed here, in a way that directly engages meaning, representation and sexual division.

Some theses, arguments made:

(1) The woman is more naturally a writer: since close to the mother tongue, close to creation, 'it is the woman who is more the writer, by the very fact that she creates an idiom; and the poet knows well that it is the mother tongue he speaks and no other';⁸⁸ since her excessive *jouissance* is at the expense of the phallus, the signifier, is itself writing, 'feminine *jouissance* can be understood as *writing* . . . this *jouissance* and the literary text (which is also written like an orgasm produced from within discourse) are the effect of the same murder of the signifier'.⁸⁹

(2) The woman is close to the body, the source of writing: 'it is obvious that a woman does not write like a man, because she speaks with the body; writing is of the body';⁹⁰ writing resembles the body and the sexual division of male and female is expressed

88 E Lemoine-Luccioni, 'Ecrire', *Sorcières* n7, p14.

89 Montrelay, *op cit*, pp80-81; 'Inquiry into femininity', p99.

90 H Cixous; 'Quelques questions à Hélène Cixous', *Les Cahiers du GRIF* n13, October 1976, p20.

in the difference of women's writing, 'a feminine textual body 79 can be recognised by the fact that it is always without end, has no finish, which moreover is what makes the feminine text very often difficult to read'.⁹¹

(3) The woman is there in language outside the law, the order of the symbolic; a woman's writing thus 'jams the machinery of theory', has no place for 'the concept as such', is 'spoken, not meta-spoken', 'fluid' in style, moving towards a syntax of 'auto-affection' with 'neither subject nor object'.⁹²

(4) There is no specific identity of the feminine in writing: 'it is not man, woman that one encounters, nor masculine, feminine, but difference itself, at work, in the midst of its agitations, and the changing experiences of identity: "I am no one! who are you?"', asks Emily Dickinson'.⁹³ The notion of a feminine writing that would be the property of women poses a principle of sexual identity which the experience of writing precisely calls into question: 'It is becoming more and more difficult today, confronted by the experiments of modern art, not to question along with the identity of the subject the very principle of a sexual identity, which is nevertheless claimed by feminist movements. I do not find it easy to define a masculine or feminine specificity when I think of the great aesthetic experiences of the decentering of identity . . .'.⁹⁴ What is at stake is a body that is radically strange, neither man nor woman.

Set out in this way, these theses lack the detail of their complex elaboration; they are sketched out simply as an indication of arguments that have been strongly developed and that raise issues of sexual differentiation in language and its practice. The first, second and third have clear links, run into one another at various points (the separation into theses here is no more than a convenience of presentation). The fourth too has its intersections with the others; the idea of writing as feminine *jouissance* indicated in the first, for example, is not necessarily mapped onto the sexual division of male and female individuals: Montrelay herself cites male-sex writers in this connection (Bataille, Jarry, Jabès), on the same grounds as those from which writing is with the woman, across men and women, not in the sense of a feminine specificity but in that of a work against existing orders: 'Faced with language, woman and writer (man or woman) are in one and the same situation. For their existence, they must force to reality a discourse that is already in submission to a functional irreality (officially called reality) . . . It remains to them to practice the forgetting of the hierarchical orders, the categories . . . Forgetting, it is exactly

91 Cixous, 'Le sexe ou la tête?', p14.

92 Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, pp75, 122, 141, 76, 130, 132.

93 Viviane Forrester, 'Féminin pluriel', *Tel Quel* n74, Winter 1977, p77.

94 Julia Kristeva, 'L'autre du sexe', *Sorcières* n10, p37.

Writing is a practice of language and there is need for some consideration of the fact of the latter, consideration that comes before, must underly, the question of specificity in the former.

The language given itself as object of study by the science of linguistics excludes the problem of sexual difference from its central systematic constructions; *langue* in Saussure, *competence* in Chomsky propose general systems or logics of a language in which subject and subjectivity are not at issue. The problem of sexual difference, taken as one of variation in the language use of men and women, appears in particular branches of linguistics, most notably that of sociolinguistics. Examples of linguistic sex differentiation are noted and described that occur as systematic distinctions at the phonological, grammatical and semantic levels; distinctions, that is, are commonly to be found that are part of the language-system (for example, man-*phom*, woman-*dichan* in Thai for the first person singular I). In other words, it is possible to distinguish within many languages male and female varieties, the 'variation' often involving central aspects of the language. It is generally considered in sociolinguistic accounts that *distinct* varieties will be found in 'technologically primitive food-gathering or nomadic communities where sex roles are much more clearly delineated';⁹⁶ a language such as English, on the contrary, will have differences that 'are generally of the smaller, less obvious and more subconscious type',⁹⁷ will have tendencies discernable in speech patterns rather than systematic differences in the language itself (for example, in London English men tend to use glottal stops in words like *butter* more than women).

It is this area in sociolinguistic that linguistic work from a feminist perspective has cut across, developed and recast, work such as that by Lakoff and Key in respect of English.⁹⁸ The notion of a relative absence of any clear sexual difference is rejected: sex roles are no less 'clearly delineated' and language is a part of that delineation and the oppression it supports, constantly making and remaking difference at the expense of women. It is thus possible, and politically necessary, to describe a 'women's language' that is the place of women's oppression, a linguistic masquerade of femininity. Note that this work is in no sense a laying claim to a specific language for women; on the contrary, the

95 V Forrester, *op cit*, p69.

96 Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction*, Harmondsworth 1974, p95.

97 *Ibid*, p90.

98 Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place*, New York 1975; Mary Ritchie Key, *Male/Female Language*, Metuchen New Jersey 1975.

language it describes as women's language is to be fought against 81
as a major site of sexism.

What is at stake is speech, language in discourse, a speech in which women are assigned, expected as woman, remarked as such, rather than a systematic constraint in the language: in Amazonian Cocama male and female speakers necessarily – a necessity of the language – use different pronoun series; in American English both male and female speakers can and do use modal constructions (with *could*, *might*, etc) but the use of such constructions can also be seen, according to Lakoff and Key, as a defining tendency in the speech of women: 'females use more of these words which show indefiniteness, inconclusiveness, and uncertainty'.⁹⁹ Absent in Lakoff and Key is any idea that this difference in speech, in language use, is a positive value, that there is a difference which could provide an authentic realisation of the feminine for women in the way suggested in the first three theses on writing listed above. Indeed, the characteristics given as value in those theses are echoed negatively in the descriptions of women's language proposed by Lakoff and Key, where they are grasped as the very terms of the identity of the woman defined within patriarchy. It may be that 'the phallic is the seriousness of meaning'¹⁰⁰ (a position close to *Ball of Fire* . . . and to Lacan), Lakoff and Key, however, are concerned to reject not seriousness but, precisely, the discursive specifications of woman as inconsistent, unfinished, fluid; for them, the point is not to jam theory and refuse meta-language but to combat the 'bilingualism', the additional women's language, that constrains women to being always also the woman, the difference, and thus always lacking, divided against themselves in language. From the other side, at it were, reversing the perspective, Lakoff and Key might be reproached with a certain indifference. Women's language is attacked, but towards what? Nothing is *fundamentally* changed, displaced, in the existing order. Lakoff talks of 'women's language' and 'neutral language', but that 'neutral' language can itself be regarded as an area of oppression, the alienation of difference in the order of the same of the phallus which, accepting that language, the woman then becomes: 'as soon as she speaks the discourse of the community, a woman becomes phallus';¹⁰¹ 'one is born in a language and the language speaks us, dictates to us its law which is a law of death; it dictates its family model, its marital model; as soon as one is producing a sentence, as one is posing being, a question on being, ontology, one is already caught in a certain type of masculine desire that is the motor force of philosophical discourse; as soon as one asks

⁹⁹ Key, *op cit*, p76.

¹⁰⁰ Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p157.

¹⁰¹ J Kristeva, 'Sujet dans le langage et pratique politique', *Psychanalyse et politique*, Paris 1974, p61.

- 82 the question "what is it?", as soon as one asks a question, demands an answer, one is already taken up in masculine interpellation'.¹⁰² Which comes back round to the arguments concerning a feminine specificity in writing: for the woman, either silence, she silenced in the discursive reality, the reality of discourse, or writing as silence, her silencing – Forrester's 'forgetting' – of the orders of language, her practice of a language that is wild, on the body, unauthorised.

The woman is the ruin of representation, unrepresentable, but everywhere represented in language, speech and writing – from the theses on writing to the descriptions of Lakoff and Key, a spiral, an overlap with no join.

Caused in language, the subject, man or woman, is there divided, subject to the division, the symbolic order, in which, against which, it returns, fixing with signifiers and images its interrogation of desire, the desire of the Other; and the penis-phallus is such a fixing, such a point of return, not the foundation of the signifier, the symbolic itself. Language, symbolic, construction of the subject are not simply ideological (for example, the signifier does not contain a meaning, be it the phallus) but neither are they simply not not simply ideological (for example, the phallus can be given to order the signifier to its meaning); there is a simultaneity of symbolic and ideology, one image for which could be that of the recto and verso of a piece of paper.¹⁰³ Like that of the man, the return of the woman, her separation from the alienation of the symbolic division, her replies to the desire of the Other, is a return according to the rules of the representations given, of the order gained over the movement of symbolic divisions, the chain of signifying elements. What is designated unrepresentable is what is finally the most strongly represented, an absence or lack named and figured as such, a real which comes back to the subject in its system, its suture of symbolic and imaginary. Lacan says something important when he stresses that 'images and symbols in the woman cannot be isolated from images and symbols of the woman . . . the representation of female sexuality conditions, repressed or not, its working . . .' (E, p728). It is not so easy to distinguish the represented and something else; what is repressed is not something unrepresentable, it is something structured, in

102 Cixous, 'Le sexe ou la tête?', p7.

103 'There is a material history of the construction of the individual as subject and that history is also the social construction of the subject; it is not, in other words, that there is first of all the construction of a subject for social/ideological formations and then the placing of that constructed subject-support in those formations, it is that the two processes are one, in a kind of necessary simultaneity – like the recto and verso of a piece of paper', 'Anata mo', *Screen* v17 n4, Winter 1976/77, p62.

representation (repression in the Freudian theory of the unconscious bears exactly on representations). In this sense, the woman is not the ruin of representation but its veritable support in the patriarchal order, the assigned point at – on – which representation holds and makes up lack, the vanishing point on which the subject that representation represents fixes to close the division of which it is the effect; setting in place then, in the alienation-separation return, of a modelling of desire in which the woman takes the (imaginary) place of the Other, is procured as the truth of the man. What is always in question is a closure of the subject, of subjects, in a specific join – the suture – of symbolic and imaginary as field of the representation of the subject that ceaselessly holds in desire, puts it into a perspective, and the perspective above all of *man* and *woman*. Thus the massive functioning today of the eroticisation of castration: the symbolic division, effect of the subject, is taken over on man and woman as difference around the penis-phallus as 'normal' fetish ('the normal prototype of fetishes is a man's penis'),¹⁰⁴ which is the relation of men, women and desire in a particular economy of representation, that of disavowal, the recognition and refusal of lack; the difference of the woman is the visibility of the man, the assured perspective, the form of exchange; with woman's representing as *the* lack, *the* difference, her projection as image and screen, the point – the erotic return – of a *certain* mystery, the veil of truth ('this lack is only ever presented as reflection on a veil', *SII*, p261).

VI

In discussions of a specifically feminine writing, emphasis is often put on the voice: 'all the feminine texts that I have read are very close to the *voice*, are very close to the flesh of the language, much more than in masculine texts'.¹⁰⁵ A closeness to the voice as a trace of the intensity of the attachment to the mother: 'to write in the feminine is to put over what is cut off by the symbolic, the voice of the mother, it is to put over what is most archaic';¹⁰⁶ a closeness in the voice to words 'as in the first moments of life when they extended the body of the mother and simultaneously circumscribed the place of suspension of her desire';¹⁰⁷ a voice imagined in the field of the Other as invocation of the mother, movement through words to the invocatory 'grain of the voice',¹⁰⁸

104 S Freud, 'Fetishism', p157.

105 Cixous, 'Le sexe ou la tête?', p14; cf *Sorcières* n2, an issue devoted entirely to 'the voice'.

106 *Ibid*, p14.

107 Montrelay, *op cit*, p64; 'Inquiry into femininity', p87.

108 'The "grain" is that: the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue.' Roland Barthes, 'The grain of the voice', *Image-Music-Text*, London 1977, p182.

- 84 'her' body in language – 'something of the circuit of drive of the voice erogenises the feminine'.¹⁰⁹

The emphasis is on the voice as against the look; in women's texts, writes Montrelay, 'no contour is traced on which the eye could rest'.¹¹⁰ The look is a distance, an absence of grain,¹¹¹ is 'theoretical' in Hegel's use of the term in the *Aesthetik* to privilege vision over the other senses: 'vision, on the contrary, finds itself in a purely theoretical relationship with objects, through the intermediary of light, that immaterial matter which truly leaves objects their freedom, lighting and illuminating without consuming them'.¹¹² Irigaray reverses the valuation in that description for women: 'Investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More than the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing has brought an impoverishment of bodily relations. It has contributed to disembodiment sexuality. The moment the look dominates, the body loses in materiality.'¹¹³ Cixous talks of 'looking with closed eyes'.¹¹⁴

'She looked very lovely under her black hair hung loose over her neck and bosom, sparkling with drops to imitate dew, and it seemed a pity that only ladies were to look at her.'

'Gustave was made to kneel down on the ground in front of the sofa, and support a round mirror, before which the wilful little lady had elected to try on the silken hose and dainty boots.'

These brief passages are from a work of nineteenth century pornography (an example of the common whipping literature of the period), the author and narrator of which is given as being a woman.¹¹⁵ This proposition of female author/narratorship is a convention that doubles over from and against itself in the spectacle

109 Diamantis, 'Recherches sur la féminité', p32.

110 Montrelay, *op cit*, p153.

111 Unless, for instance, grain is to be sought somewhere with regard to colour – colour which finally disturbs perspective representation in the history of painting, colour which is a factor in 'the perversion of the sense of sight', in the 'blindness' often noted in hysteria, a shift in the balance of the intensities of the normal state of colour vision (cf JM Charcot, *Leçons sur les maladies du système nerveux, Oeuvres complètes* vI, Paris 1886, pp427-434).

112 G W F Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik, Sämtliche Werke* v13, Stuttgart 1927-28, p254. Hegel also admits hearing as a theoretical sense but only in so far as he can separate it from any of that intimacy with the body stressed as the reality of the voice in feminine writing.

113 L Irigaray, interview, in *Les femmes, la pornographie, l'érotisme* ed M-F Hans and G Lapouge, Paris 1978, p 50.

114 H Cixous, 'Entretien avec Françoise van Rossum-Guyon', *Revue des sciences humaines* n168, 1977, p487.

115 Margaret Anson, *The Merry Order of St Bridget: Personal Recol-*

of the book's discourse. The desire is the intimacy of the woman, the order of women, for the man, the intimacy existing only from the term of its intrusion, the male gaze; what is said is the intact beauty of the woman, all her flawless brilliance, and the absence of a look ('it seemed a pity . . .') which is thus simultaneously present, in the enunciation, the very point of the passage and the point from which it is written, the spectacle constructed. The book's scenes are, without surprise, those of the whole panoply of the male, a mixture of voyeurism and fetishism: the young Gustave, man allowed into the fiction as child in order to preserve the intimacy and the fetishistic moment, at the woman's feet, holding the mirror, the spectator and the spectacularity of the woman, the objects of disavowal and its erotic – hose, boots. No doubt that the writing is a representation-representing in which subjects are joined in the perspective of 'the man' and 'the woman' from the site – and from the sight – of the man as model of the elaboration-translation of desire; the woman author/narrator is a fiction – and had a woman been the book's writer, she would have been that fiction of the man, a term of its repeated order. All this, it might be added, is not too far from Lacan's writing of St Teresa: there is an intimacy of the woman, a certain aura, call it *jouissance*, the truth of which it is ceaselessly necessary to surprise, to catch in the veil of its images with a look that masters, preserving the certainty, 'you only have to go and look . . .'

A mixture of voyeurism and fetishism . . . the characterisation of an area inevitably encountered in considering the look, in thinking of cinema.¹¹⁶ Voyeurism and fetishism, clinically, are male 'perversions' ('fetishism is found mostly in males, rarely in females', 'voyeurs, seemingly all males'),¹¹⁷ and perversions that it is not too rare to find linked in the standard medical textbooks themselves with discussions of theatre and cinema, discussions which note, for example, the adverse effects of 'the exploitation of sex known as glamour'.¹¹⁸

Freud poses from early on a libidinal investment in looking to see, in seeing: 'A desire to see the organs peculiar to each sex exposed is one of the original components of our libido . . . The libido for looking . . . is present in everyone in two forms, active

lections of the Use of the Rod, York 1857 (place and date of publication as on title page but, as often with works of this kind, certainly deliberately erroneous).

116 Cf Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen* v16 n3, Autumn 1975, pp6-18; much of what follows is indebted to Mulvey's influential study.

117 'Sexual deviations', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Macropaedia) v16, Chicago, etc 1974, pp607-608.

118 Clifford Allen, *The Sexual Perversions and Abnormalities*, London 1949, p281.

86 and passive, male and female; and, according to the preponderance of the sexual character, one form or the other predominates.¹¹⁹ The pleasure in looking is in relation to knowledge which makes use of it, the looking to see, to know the other body. It was emphasised earlier how important to Freud is the appeal to the look to establish castration: boy and girl see the lack.

In this context, the following points may be noted:

(1) Seeing for Freud is 'an activity that ultimately is derived from touching'¹²⁰ which it thus extends and displaces.

(2) The eye as organ is the locus of at least two functions: 'the eyes perceive not only alterations in the external world which are important for the preservation of life, but also characteristics of objects which lead to their being chosen as objects of love – their charms'.¹²¹ There are more or less serious disturbances if the two functions are not held together in unity and the sexual aspect begins to dominate; Freud notes in this connection 'pathological consequences if the two fundamental instincts are disunited and if the ego maintains a repression of the sexual component instinct concerned . . . the sexual component instinct which makes use of looking – sexual pleasure in looking – has drawn upon itself defensive action by the ego instincts in consequence of its excessive demands . . .'.¹²² The classic example of such psychogenic disturbance of vision is provided by the 'blindness' often found in hysterics but Freud is at pains to stress equally the common experience of this 'blindness of the seeing eye'.¹²³

(3) The common experience is had by men and women. The fact of the importance of that experience, at its extreme, in hysteria, in the case of the women who alone furnish the material for the *Studies on Hysteria*, links it as much with the latter as with the former. Yet it is not by chance that Freud's major illustration for the disturbance caused by the conflict of sexual and ego in vision is the story of Peeping Tom, the active scopophilia (pleasure in seeing) of voyeurism: 'As regards the eye, we are in the habit of translating the obscure psychical processes concerned in the repression of sexual scopophilia and in the development of the psychogenic disturbance of vision as though a punishing voice was speaking from within the subject and saying: "Because you sought to misuse your organ of sight for evil sensual pleasures, it is fitting that you should not see anything at all any more", and as though it was in this way approving the outcome of the process.

119 S Freud, 'Jokes and their relation to the unconscious', *Standard Edition*, vVIII, p98.

120 S Freud, 'Three essays on the theory of sexuality', p156.

121 S Freud, 'The psychoanalytic view of psychogenic disturbance of vision', *Standard Edition* vXI, p216.

122 *Ibid*, p216.

123 S Freud, 'Studies on hysteria', *Standard Edition* vII, p117.

The idea of talion punishment is involved in this, and in fact our explanation of psychogenic disturbance of vision coincides with what is suggested by myths and legends. The beautiful legend of Lady Godiva tells how all the town's inhabitants hid behind their shuttered windows, so as to make easier the lady's task of riding naked through the streets in broad daylight, and how the only man who peeped through the shutters at her revealed loveliness was punished by going blind.¹²⁴ Not by chance because Freud's constant emphasis elsewhere is on libidinal investment in the eye as phallus; which is what is at stake in the Lady Godiva/Peeping Tom legend: the scene of the woman, the violation, the blinding-castration. As Freud puts it in the essay on 'The uncanny', which is perhaps the most important reference for this emphasis, 'the substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ . . . is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasies'.¹²⁵ One might cite, as a kind of condensation here, the recorded case of a male patient who identified his eye with a speculum and was then racked with the fear of his look becoming 'stuck' on things and his losing his sight.¹²⁶

(4) Lacan has it that the scopic drive is 'that which most completely eludes the term of castration', referring at the same time to Freud's paper on 'Instincts and their vicissitudes' (SXI, p74).¹²⁷ In that paper, written just after that introducing narcissism,¹²⁸ Freud identifies an initial autoerotic element in scopophilia, not formulated in the description quoted earlier from 'Jokes and their relation to the unconscious', which distinguishes it from other drives: 'for the beginning of its activity the scopophilic instinct is auto-erotic: it has indeed an object, but that object is the subject's own body'.¹²⁹ This is the context of the imbrication of specular and imaginary and of the importance of the mirror stage; the perceived image of the body gives the principle of unity, the one, identity – an identity that can never be other than that imaginary, in which, through the look, castration can be eluded, held off.

(5) The imaginary can then be taken as 'before' sexual difference since, precisely, it identifies, is elusion, proposes the one for the subject. Yet the symbolic, division, is always there, and, for example, in the mirror stage in the surrounds of the child who sees, the person who holds, encourages, confirms, but also

124 'The psychoanalytic view of psychogenic disturbance of vision', p217.

125 S Freud, 'The Uncanny', *Standard Edition* vXVII, p231.

126 Jacques Chazaud, *Les Perversions sexuelles*, Toulouse 1973, p119.

127 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p78.

128 S Freud, 'On narcissism: an introduction', *Standard Edition* vXIV, pp69-102; 'Instincts and their vicissitudes', *Standard Edition* vXIV, pp111-140.

129 'Instincts and their vicissitudes', p130.

88 accompanies from the place of the other. The scopic drive may elude the term of castration but the look returns the other, castration, the other – the evil – eye. Hence Lacan's long account of the dialectic of eye and look. The look presents itself to us in an uncanny contingency, symbolic of 'the lack that constitutes castration anxiety' (SXI, p70):¹³⁰ your look is never from where I see, my look is never what I want to see. In this dialectic, however, the look is constantly evanescent, elided in the self-turning power of the investment in the eye, in seeing, in the constitution of the imaginary, in 'that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness' (SXI, p71),¹³¹ consciousness in its illusion 'of *seeing itself seeing itself*, in which the look is elided' (SXI, p79).¹³² The world is given itself as spectacle by the subject, as vision, something like a pure consciousness, at rest, indifferent, all seeing (with the ambiguity there the catch of the subject in the imaginary): 'The world is omnivoyeur, not exhibitionistic – it does not provoke our look. When it does begin to provoke it, then begins too the feeling of strangeness' (SXI, pp 71-72).¹³³ Note that Lacan compares this all-seeingness to 'the satisfaction of a woman who knows that she is being looked at, on condition that she is not shown it' (SXI, p71).¹³⁴

The comparison is significant. Throughout the discussion of the eye/look dialectic, Lacan indicates no sexual differentiation as between male and female or masculine and feminine, yet such a differentiation is not absent, the comparison is its trace.

The eye/look dialectic functions as division, symbolises lack, sets the subject in the field of the desire of the Other, with the imaginary of the eye, the evanescence of the look, then defined as the eluding of the term of castration. Which term is that of the articulation of symbolic and sexual difference. The imaginary is never 'before', it is always from, from the symbolic construction of the subject, is a join of the subject, its identifications of desire. The difficulty in the theory is that castration is the term both of the division of the subject in the movement of symbolic difference and of a sexual difference that differentiates individual subjects as between male and female; it crosses, in other words, from universal function to effective realisation without doubt, with the latter thus becoming the constant form of the former and, in fact, its nature – we are back with Freud's 'inadequate empirical and conventional equation', Lacan's 'through sexual reality that the signifier came into the world'.

130 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p73.

131 *Ibid*, p74.

132 *Ibid*, p82.

133 *Ibid*, p75.

134 *Ibid*, p75.

The castration that is posed and eluded in the shifts of the eye/look dialectic is a relation of the symbolic in a specific production of sexual difference. The difference is specific in Lacan's account which pulls towards a voyeurism that is its underlying order: the dialectic is also, immediately, the look of the man, the image of the woman, 'the satisfaction of a woman who knows she is being looked at'. Everything turns on the castration complex and the central phallus, its visibility and the spectacle of lack; the subject, as Lacan puts it at one point, 'looks at itself in its sexual member' (SXI, p177)¹³⁵ and delights in being seen from that look. What the voyeur seeks, poses, is not the phallus on the body of the other but its absence as the definition of the mastering presence, the security, of his position, his seeing, his phallus (Peeping Tom behind the shutters, penetrating the space of the other, holding its image . . .); the desire is for the other to be spectacle not subject, or only the subject of that same desire, its exact echo – the echo that Lacan hears to *his* satisfaction when he talks of that 'satisfaction of a woman who knows she is being looked at'. Fetishism too, which often involves the scopophilic drive, has its scenario of the spectacle of castration; and where what is at stake is not to assert that the woman has the penis-phallus but to believe in the intact, to hold that the woman is not castrated, that nothing is lost, that his representation, and of him, works. Always, from voyeurism to fetishism, the erotisation of castration.

'The woman' is the support of this erotisation, the whole scene of the phallus, is representation. There is a painting by Magritte that is clear in this respect (clear not from any certainty to be seen but from the elements it assembles as a statement on that very certainty). Entitled *Representation* (*La représentation*, 1937, Penrose Collection, London), it shows the frame of a mirror in the form of a keyhole, with, on the surface of the mirror, filling its frame, the keyhole, the torso of a nude woman, with the line of the thighs in a perfect discretion of any sex. The woman is to be seen, completely, she is all seeing, satisfied in that, always there in the mirror, hidden and visible, behind the keyhole; which is to say that, omnivoyeur, spectacle of vision, she has no look, provokes only in image and not as subject in return; and, above all, no look of her sex. The discretion of the sex in the Magritte painting is an important element in its statement on representation. The history of the nude in western art from classical times is one of the omission of a sex for the woman (where the penis is figured readily on any statue of the nude man): what is thus presented in her representation is not any lack, not the lack, but nothing, the fully intact, the body smooth without break, the scopophilic

135 *Ibid*, p194

90 defence of 'beauty'.¹³⁶ For beauty is exactly *the* woman as *all*, undivided in herself, the perfect image. 'Like a god, just as empty, beauty can say only: *I am as I am*',¹³⁷ and, within the *I am as I am*, the *I saw myself seeing myself* which Lacan regards as the 'theme' of 'femininity': the contained spectacle, for me, the man, and, as my desire, the support of my representation, for herself.

Here, a problem can be posed as follows:¹³⁸ agreed, the terms of representation classically are those of the production and representing of woman as all, beauty to see, the woman; it is nevertheless the case that the coming of the photograph changes something: something that can be grasped, for example, in developments in social pornography (pornography of wide and open distribution in society, eg *Penthouse*) where what are now given are directly vaginal images.¹³⁹ That there is change is certain; as to the transformation of the economy of representation, the question is more difficult.

By its weight of reality ('record', 'reproduction'), the photograph disturbs the established order of art and beauty; hence a kind of balance of tensions in its immediate practice and conception: the photograph is too real, obliterates beauty, is thus not fitted for the depiction of the body (Nadar, for instance, disapproves of the use of photography for the nude); the photograph because of that real is to be directly exploited as a commerce of the body seen, as the possession of its actuality in image (a police raid on just one specialist London photographer in 1874 allows the seizure of some 130,248 obscene photographs plus 5,000 stereoscopic slides).¹⁴⁰ Obviously, that commerce is not without its relations to the established representations of art: various sublimations of the photographic real of the body through strategies of focus, lighting, retouching, and so on; various 're-framings', realignments to the same attention, as with the massive speculation on the photograph of the nude girl child, the female-not-a-sexed-woman, before 'stream and river meet'.¹⁴¹ It remains,

136 Cf Robert Fliess, *Erogenicity and Libido*, New York 1956, pp171-172.

137 R Barthes, *S/Z*, Paris 1970, p40; trans *S/Z*, London 1975, p33.

138 The problem is suggested by Griselda Pollock, 'What's wrong with images of women?', *Screen Education* n24, Autumn 1977, pp25-34.

139 'a directness that radically questions the psychoanalytically based analyses of images of women undertaken by Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey and the notions of castration fears and the phallic woman', Pollock, *op cit*, p30.

140 Report in the *London Times*, 20 April 1874, p14.

141 'About nine out of ten, I think, of my child friendships get shipwrecked at the critical point "where the stream and river meet", and the child friends, once so affectionate, become uninteresting acquaintances whom I have no wish to set eyes on again.' C L Dodgson, cit in *Lewis Carroll Photographer* ed H Gernsheim, New York 1969, p18.

however, that the photograph is not the painting; it points to a real as an immediate – as an immediately visible – source of its image, says somewhere an actuality of a body, a once-present here-now. In the painting or sculpture, the sex of the woman is not 'hidden', there is nothing 'not seen'; the photograph, posing the woman discretely, reproduces perhaps the same figure as of the nude in art but brings with it a certain effect of the withheld, the out-of-sight. The completely satisfiable curiosity of the real that is the photograph's view, its ideological currency, is inevitably the compulsion to 'show everything', to 'really present' the sex of the woman, women's sexual organs (it then being, in a mirror reversal from classic representation in the history of art, the depiction of the male sex that is problematic, that lags behind, only very recently a possibility for social pornography – as though the penis-phallus hold might be threatened).

And yet . . . and yet the real of the photograph is a real that is always an image; the veil, the completion of representation, persists, a whole imaginary of the body's presence. The real of the body, the body now in its symbolic relation in the process of the individual as subject, is discordant, takes voice from the unconscious ('as though, precisely, it was not from the unconscious that the body had voice')¹⁴² not from the photograph, which is always in a sense concordant, making an image. The photograph can only show and can never show the woman's sex, 'her' sexuality retained as exhibition. Something changes but the economy remains more or less stable, still of the order of phallic castration. One, the man, perhaps the woman in place in his perspective, is assured of the sex of the woman, as of his own thereby (the look as phallus); assured again and again, since the unit here is not the possible knowledge of a single photograph but the continual confirmation of the series, the exhaustion of all women, the guarantee of *the* woman, in this image. Pornography plays exactly the series: the resumption from scene to scene, film to film, from one photograph to the next, one magazine issue to another; according to a kind of metonymisation of the imaginary, the finite number standing open for the total number of women which would make the final *one*. At any moment, moreover, the confirmation can never be sure, since its only basis is in the movement of the accountability for vision, an interminable summing; the photographer Henri Maccheroni takes 2,000 photographs of one woman's sex, envisages a further set . . .¹⁴³ No truth is produced with the multiplication of such photographs other than that the woman is the difference of the man who is reassured in his place, compulsively reposing the fact of his certainty, his vision:

142 J Lacan, 'L'étourdit', *Scilicet* n4, p20.

143 A sample of Maccheroni's work can be found in 'Trente-deux photographies du sexe d'une femme', *Obliques* n12/13, 1977, pp313-328.

What then of the look for the woman, of woman subjects in seeing? The reply given by psychoanalysis is from the phallus. If the woman looks, the spectacle provokes, castration is in the air, the Medusa's head is not far off; thus, she must not look, is absorbed herself on the side of the seen, seeing herself seeing herself, Lacan's femininity. By virtue of the doubling unity of her specular relation to the mother, parent of the same sex, the woman is specified as being in a particular, different relation to the scopical function, to pleasure in seeing: 'For the girl, the setting at a distance is a difficult experience. She prefers to tip over into the image guaranteed for her (as she believes) by the quite as captive look of the mother and, later, by the all powerful look of the father. So she prefers to believe in that image. She believes she is herself. She thus equates herself with the full and flawless figure, no crack, which preserves and is preserved by the parental authority. In so doing, she substitutes for the person of the mother crucial in the *fort/da* game her own person figured by her body in the specular image; an image that the mother's look brings out, "causes". It is an inverted *fort/da*, and it is the whole body which becomes the stake of symbolisation, with the consequent risks of fragmentation and hysterical paralyses. But in thus offering herself to the look, in giving herself for sight, according to the sequence: see, see oneself, give oneself to be seen, be seen, the girl – unless she falls into the complete alienation of the hysteric – provokes the Other to an encounter and a reply which give her pleasure.'¹⁴⁴

VII

Cinema then, and, to start, the question of its seeing, its look. It is commonly said that cinema is voyeurist, a statement which can go from the simple idea that there is a pleasure of seeing involved in the experience of films to the argument made by Laura Mulvey to the effect that visual pleasure in narrative cinema is a structure of voyeurism which is oppressive in its relation of women and which must thus be challenged quite radically – what is needed is the destruction of the visual pleasure of the narrative fiction film, of film's dependence on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms. Along the line of that statement can be found positions which, from a perspective of feminist film criticism and practice, nevertheless argue a use rather than a destruction of cinema's voyeurism; Claire Johnston, for example, writes that: 'voyeuristic pleasure itself cannot be eliminated from the cinema; indeed, it is vital for the cinema's survival and its development as

144 Lemoine-Luccioni, *Partage des femmes*, p85.

In several essays, Metz has attempted to characterise a specific regime of voyeurism that is a function of the cinema machine, the institution of cinema as signifier. Cinema's voyeurism is unilateral: what is seen does not know it is being seen, is present in its absence, the spectator is thus not constrained to any knowledge of he or she as voyeur, the experience is that of a 'surprise' of vision, figures and objects as though surprised by the spectator's look. The primary identification of the spectator, moreover, is with him or herself as a pure '*voyance*', a pure act of seeing, a consciousness posed, untroubled, for spectacle.¹⁴⁶

The characterisation seems to pose an instance of the spectator in the machine outside of any problem of sexual difference, a total *voyance*, and to relay that instance with regard to what is seen in terms that pull towards such a problem, the spectator as voyeur. It is, after all, difficult to introduce voyeurism into the discussion without engaging its definition of a look that is male and phallic. Metz is not far from the 'quasi obscenity of seeing' in cinema noted by Bazin, the keyhole aspect, the impression of a violation of space:¹⁴⁷ the spectator who looks from the comfort of the dark onto the illuminated scene of the bodies moving on screen – just like Peeping Tom in Freud's description, with the single and vital exception that here the seeing is allowed, the intrusion and its pleasure permitted, unpunished, no division only images, the spectator's images, images *for*.

In fact, Metz links cinematic scopophilia particularly to the primal scene: 'It is never my partner I see but a photograph of my partner. I am still a voyeur but according to a different regime: that of the primal scene and the keyhole';¹⁴⁸ 'the cinema retains something of the peculiar prohibited character of the vision of the primal scene – the latter is always surprised, never contemplated at leisure . . .'.¹⁴⁹ Agreed, but then the 'surprise' here is evidently the term of a controlled repetition, cinema as something of the fabrication of a *wanted* primal scene, a constant presence for the subject at its leisure, seeing knowing, outside anguish, deferral, a definitive answer in the seen. Which is simply to stress again cinema as the establishment – the institution –

145 C Johnston, 'Towards a feminist film practice: some theses', *Edinburgh 76 Magazine*, 1976, p50.

146 Cf C Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire*, Paris 1977, pp82-91, 113-120; trans 'The imaginary signifier', *Screen* v16, n2, Summer 1975, pp61-66; History/discourse: note on two voyeurisms', *Edinburgh 76 Magazine*, 1976, pp21-25.

147 A Bazin, 'Théâtre et cinéma', *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* VII, Paris 1959, p86.

148 *Le Signifiant imaginaire*, pp117-118; 'History/discourse: note on two voyeurisms', p23.

149 *Ibid*, p91; 'The imaginary signifier', p65.

- 94 of the security of the look: the image holds and the eye is smoothed over castration, images for me, my representations, mine; the privilege of the subject in that 'bipolar reflexive relation by which, as soon as I perceive, my representations belong to me' (SXI, p76).¹⁵⁰

'The film is not exhibitionist. I look at it, but it does not look at me looking at it. It knows what I am doing, but it does not want to know.'¹⁵¹ Thus the film, remember Lacan, is like the world, not exhibitionist but omnivoyeur, all seeing, a showing, a giving for sight, a kind of here-see (film as spectacle of the world, reproduction of life). Lacan talks of an 'appetite of the eye' (SXI, p105)¹⁵² that the production of images – his specific example is painting – serves to feed, an appetite that is the force of the subject's desire in the dialectic of eye and look mentioned earlier. The subject seeing through the keyhole in the subject as 'hidden look entirely' (SXI, p166),¹⁵³ maintained in the totality of the seen scene, its mastery. For the eye of that seen scene, the look itself is an object for sight and a site of desire: of desire of the Other, something which substitutes for the Other in the form of the cause of desire, and desire in the Other, a look imagined as the desire of the Other in which the subject can identify against the strangeness, the castration, of the Other's look in the dialectic. From the desire of the Other to desire in the Other, a certain 'descent of desire' to the effect of a 'giving to be seen' (SXI, p105),¹⁵⁴ the subject is confirmed in its own eyes, produced as unity – as certainty – of vision; and that descent, that confirmation, is the point of the function of picture or film, of the subject's representation in image: 'it is to this register of the eye as made desperate by the look that we must go if we are to grasp the calming, civilising and fascinating power of the function of the picture' (SXI, p106).¹⁵⁵

The statement that the film is not exhibitionist, moreover, brings with it not just the echo of Lacan's similar description of the world for the subject but equally that of the comparison he then immediately makes with the satisfaction of the woman who knows she is being looked at while preserving the negation of the knowledge of the fact of that looking. And there is a rightness about this sudden echoing join of film and world and woman, the woman who is the omnipresent centre of film's world in the institution of cinema, who is the real spectacle, the place where the look – the desire of the Other – is to be finally held and elided. Elided

150 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p81.

151 Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginaire*, p117; History/discourse: note on two voyeurisms', p23.

152 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p115.

153 *Ibid*, p182.

154 *Ibid*, p115.

155 *Ibid*, p116.

not by denying difference but by containing difference in her image, the good image of the woman, the difference of the phallus (which is what is at stake for voyeur or fetishist). Once again, Lacan's reference to the Bernini statue has its exemplariness: the certain vision of the woman, the certainty in the image, the spectator's gaze carried by the angelic figure looking down on the swooning Teresa, her eyes – the woman's – closing, her look – any return of difference against the difference – absent, fore-closed.

In an interview, Chantal Akerman talks of a non-voyeuristic camera in her film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* ('But the camera was not voyeuristic in the commercial way because you always knew where I was. You know, it wasn't shot through the keyhole.')156 and stresses at the same time the importance for her work of pleasure in seeing, '*la jouissance du voir*' ('When I saw *Hotel Monterey* again this morning, I really thought it was an erotic film. I felt that way – *la jouissance du voir*.')157

Pleasure in seeing, *la jouissance du voir*, Freud's *Schaulust*. The question is as to the possibility of a relation of that pleasure other than in terms of voyeurism (Lacan, while retaining the scopic drive as independent of its relation as the place of the subject in perversion, nevertheless states at once that *Schaulust* is manifested in the latter and moves immediately to discussion of voyeurism, *SXI*, pp165-167).¹⁵⁸ Mulvey's call for the destruction of visual pleasure leaves the question open inasmuch as it concerns the visual pleasure of 'narrative cinema', 'traditional film form', perhaps avoids it – but to pose it elsewhere in her and Wollen's films – inasmuch as the informing conception of an alternative practice is from the standpoint of that call, that destruction: 'The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical filmmakers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment. There is no doubt that this destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the "invisible guest", and highlights how film has depended on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms.'159

Akerman could argue her non-voyeuristic camera in line with this conception: the control, her implication, knowing where she was, is given precisely as a refusal to recreate the 'invisible guest', the privilege of a subject produced as undifferentiated unity of vision, in the security of its own sight. What becomes urgent is

156 'Chantal Akerman on *Jeanne Dielman*', *Camera Obscura* n2, 1978, p119.

157 *Ibid*, p121.

158 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp181-184.

159 Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', p18.

96 the dissociation of the bind of relaying looks (of spectator, camera, character) that is the force and the pleasure of cinema in its fundamental ideological and commercial development, the fiction film. That dissociation, however, is a very difficult problem of representation, of the differentiation of the discursive relations of the subject. The bind of looks is a specific representation, a position and an image, but that specificity is not a simple choice; in a sense, indeed, 'specific' here should be taken as a limitation *from* representation, not *on* it, the bind is a construction of the difference that is the determining point of the very institution of the bind, the establishment of its whole machinery, its elements. The bind may be loosened, the terms of representation remain – and, for example, the look. Is it possible for a woman to take place in a film without representing a male desire?¹⁶⁰

'Taking place' there refers both to position and image, producing a film as maker or spectator and produced in a film as instance of its scene. The fiction film has massively excluded women as makers, envisaged them as spectators through genre definitions (the woman's film, melodrama, etc.) and held them endlessly in its binding play of looks, its imaging and imaginary of the woman, the final purpose of the bind. Women return only as resistance to and from the place thus assigned, their image as sign of the difference and guarantee of its order; a resistance recognised, for example, and to cite three very different films, in the critique or bafflement of the voyeuristic situation in Dorothy Arzner's *Dance, Girl, Dance*, Stephanie Rothman's *The Working Girls*, Jackie Raynal's *Deux fois*.¹⁶¹ Which resistance, however, can still itself be questioned at the point of its limits, those of the cinema within which it operates and is defined, the voyeurism it repeats as the grounds of its struggle; one implication of such a questioning then being that any image of a woman in a film, by the fact of its engagement in a process of representation that brings with it, as preconstruction, the significance of the showing of the woman as difference, her representing (a significance, a representing, to which cinema in its institution is historically committed), inevitably re-encloses women in a structure of cultural oppression that functions precisely by the currency of 'images of women'. The problem, as noted above, is always the difficult

160 Cf Cixous: 'one is always in representation, and when a woman is asked to take place in this representation, she is, of course, asked to represent man's desire', 'Entretien avec Françoise van Rossum-Guyon', p487.

161 For the recognition, see: Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary, 'Dorothy Arzner's *Dance, Girl, Dance*', in *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology* ed K Kay and G Peary, New York 1977, pp9-25; Dannis Peary, 'Stephanie Rothman: R-Rated Feminist', *Ibid*, pp179-192; Collective, 'An interrogation of the cinematic sign: woman as sexual signifier in Jackie Raynal's *Deux fois*' and 'Shot commentary', *Camera Obscura* n1, 1976, pp11-38.

one of representation; a problem not of something outside representation to be added or substituted simply, but much rather of the constantly actual completeness of representation that grasps and redetermines in its lines of exchange, and from the outset, any alternative economy. The image is at once a position, and the effective work of resistance is first and foremost, the emphasis of Akerman and Mulvey, a matter of the transformation of the relations of subjectivity in the production of the enunciation, the movement against the single unity of the subject, the confirmation of the difference. Akerman in *News from Home* gives something of this: a visibility of control as a certain demonstration of the hazard of the personal ('where I was'); a join but apart of image and sound tracks and a constant margin of rhythm; a non-appropriation of looks in a relaying fiction; a question of a woman in the discourse of the Other that finds many of the places, the topics; important earlier here (Akerman's voice reading letters from her mother, the singular everyday of family romance); a question of an image in its impossibility (the reverse shot image of the looker missing in the film, Akerman as image, this the woman, nowhere represented, other than as the fantasy of the mother receiving a photograph on the sound track, 'so glad to see how you look now', the problem of 'you', of identity and identification, and for the spectator), the production of a woman in opposition to the position, the produced, of the image; another differencing regarded in the movement of maker and spectator in the film.

A recent article on 'The avant-garde and its imaginary' was ended by its author, Constance Penley, as follows: 'If filmic practice, like the fetishistic ritual, is an inscription of the look on the body of the mother, we must now begin to consider the possibilities and consequences of the mother returning the look.'¹⁶² To which Peter Gidal, whose writings towards definition of a 'structural/materialist' film practice had been a major focus of discussion, replied: 'The last words of your piece say it all. You search for the simple inversion, the *mother looking back*. I consider the possibilities of the not-mother, not-father (looking or not).'¹⁶³

The exchange seems to crystallize much of what is most importantly at stake. To invert, the mother returning the look, is not radically to transform, is to return as well the same economy, the same dialectic of phallic castration, the same imaginary (and cinema in the fiction film has always and exactly been concerned to consider the possibilities and consequences within the fetish-

162 C Penley, 'The avant-garde and its imaginary', *Camera Obscura* n2, 1978, p26.

163 P Gidal, open reply to Constance Penley, London January 1978, para 19.

98 istic ritual, including the *constitutive* threat of its endangerment, the play of eye and look, vision and lack); the difference inverted is also the difference maintained. It might be said, moreover, that many of the films supported by the *Camera Obscura* collective in which Penley works themselves seem quite contrary to such notions of return and inversion; thus *News from Home*, shown and discussed by the collective in London,¹⁶⁴ is caught up in a problematic of a woman subject of desire divided in the symbolic, not of the mother looking back, which latter is indeed a very specific site of the film's struggle, of its struggle in representation. Here, however, crossing the sides of the exchange, is the limit of Gidal's reply. To point to the complicities of the simple inversion cannot be allowed to justify the argument of a wish for a practice somehow freed from any representing signifier – in the sense in which Lacan can say that 'men, women and children are only signifiers' (SXX, p34), in the sense in which in *News from Home* identity is posed immediately as a question of symbolic production, of discursive reality in the terms of which men and women have their existence as men and women, are represented as such, those terms including the specific history and practice and effects of cinema ('looking or not' then far from being a matter of indifference). There is no abstract managing without representation and its forms of representing, only a struggle in and across representation and representings as, every time, a specific historical demonstration and transformation of identity, difference, the process of their order, the given relations of subjectivity. In that struggle, returns, inversions *may* have their particular necessity in certain concrete instances of the demonstration-transformation, in respect, for example, of sexual differentiation which cannot be collapsed into a singularity of viewer and film, the event of their passage together, other than as avoidance of the issue, the reproduction, that is, of the existing *status quo* in so far as it can encompass the individual, the variation, a differentiation that is operated outside of direct challenge to the founding difference of the representation of subjects, men and women.

'We do not know the look of the woman.'¹⁶⁵ But could we ever in these terms? We find ourselves in a social representing of desire determined by and redetermining a structure of division – the social and economic distinction of male/female, man/woman – and oppression on the basis of that distinction – the difference assigned and confirmed in representation serving to justify and

164 'Feminism, fiction, and the avant-garde' conference, Film-makers Co-op, London 6-7 May 1978. [The present article was written prior to receiving Janet Bergstrom's comments on *News from Home* included in her piece in this issue of *Screen*.]

165 V Forrester, 'Le regard des femmes', in Musidora, *Paroles . . . elles tournent!*, Paris 1976, p12.

resolve the contradictions of the oppression. Specifically, the subject relations of vision are realised – realised and sustained in representation by institutions, machines such as cinema – in function of the establishment of sexual differentiation as the difference and of difference as the differentiation of sexes, as a representing and placing of woman to man and vice versa according to the values of seeing/being seen, active/passive, 'male'/'female'. The humanist gesture is to appeal to an unknown 'look of the woman' to be given expression, the political – as in Mulvey – is to analyse the fact of 'look' and 'woman' in the structure of its definition and to appeal to the necessity to work to end that structure and the location of man/woman it operates. Yet it is clear, except in some realm of the theoretical abstracting of contradiction, conjuncture, historical multiplicity, that that necessity can co-exist with and contain within it strategies implying the aim of constructing the look of the woman, the attempt to distinguish positively feminine elements in particular film practices, the posing of the question of visual pleasure from there. As in *Riddles of the Sphinx*, the risk of essence may have to be taken – certainly those not women have everything to learn from that process.

In his *Histoire de la révolution française*, Michelet describes the preparations for the Festival of Reason, the *Fête de la Raison*, held on November 10, 1793, the figure of Reason eventually to be played by a woman: 'The 7th still, the wish was for a statue. It was objected that a fixed image might recall the Virgin Mary and give rise to a new idolatry. A moving image was preferred, animated and living, which, changed from festival to festival, could not become an object of superstition.'¹⁶⁶

Traditionally, the problem of cinema has been the reverse of that Festival of Reason, the project of its films the fixing of the image, the woman, a suspended scenario of phallic desire, at the same time that they move, shift, displace images. Hence the balancing act that is the performance of those films: the image, the images in movement, the narrative as the join of the one and the other, the join of the spectator to the film, the locus of difference and its regulation. The narrative is the film's superstition, the production of the film as object in its image.

A film is always, however, and this is the need for the balancing out, fully symbolic, is not given in the imaginary which, on the contrary, it must construct, including the imaginary of the cinematic institution that it has to reproduce. In this context, one can understand the imaginary of the woman as lost and found in a film: the imaginary is there, the film's point of reference, but lost, the film's desire, its symbolic process and recovery. The

166 J Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française* (Pléiade edition) VII, Paris 1952, p645.

100 suspended scenario is so often *visibly* a moment of spectacle, the masquerade laid out, known as 'cinema' (the scenes of Lisa-Joan Fontaine modelling dresses in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*); a moment in that movement of the film in which the image is constantly caught up, disturbed in its fiction, its fixity, potentially troubled by the woman as a woman (for which she is punished, Susan-Janet Leigh in *Touch of Evil* is object of male spectacle and exchange but also resistance to be eliminated). It is as though the fiction film of the dominant cinema knows the imaginary of its image of the woman at the same time that it seeks to reconfirm it, with the narrative the arena of that knowledge and the tactic of its containment as coherently as possible. Not much has changed today: the woman's body is displayed, the 'obligatory' nudity, and the narrative allows a certain action of a woman in order to keep her in image, the same image (*Coma* is a striking recent example). Not much has changed but something nevertheless, the pressure on the image of the woman that has made the production of images of women in the interests of the restabilisation of that image the major preoccupation of current dominant cinema (*Coma*, *Three Women*, *The Turning Point*, *Julia*, *The Good-bye Girl* – the list is extensive and continuing); something new, the impact of the women's movement ('impact' is exactly the term of the cultural reception), that must be assumed and put back in place (hence the strategies of a film like *Coma*: produce a strong woman's image in one emphasis of the narrative in order to weaken it and her back into line: she refuses to fix him a beer but to allow the film to fix her in the shower; she leaves but, alone, her hand stretches out too late to the ringing phone in a pathetically held shot; and so on, a constant admission and erasure; and anyway always a bind of images, the woman there, a whole cinema). It is not ideologically by chance, moreover, that the pressure on the image of the woman is simultaneous with the social spread of an available pornography. At all costs sexuality must be maintained between, as the separation of, men and women and the woman produced as the difference, the *other*, the other sex. The habitual claimed response of men to pornographic films, that they are 'boring', is absolutely correct (not just a defensive denial of personal involvement): their regime, as noted, is that of a perpetual repetition, once and once more and once more again, a ceaseless verification, the truth of the image – my sex exists and the woman is different and is her sex, the difference, my representation. And that representation of the pornographic film is not far from the ever renewed once-upon-a-time of Hollywood narrative from film to film, the primal scene of the institution of cinema, the keyhole, the quasi-obscenity of seeing, and so on. The machine must represent – a prime factor of its ideological and commercial exploitation together – and the variations of its representing are held to the effect of that imperative.

Which is why the struggle is there, in and on representation, 101
a constant attention to the contemporary *history* of the subject,
why the radically new is not elsewhere, absent, unknown, but is
in that struggle itself, the transformation of that contemporary
history, of the relations of men and women as subjects of the
difference in which, exactly, they are represented and from which,
exactly again, representation works.

VIII

'For my cinema . . . the most suitable word is *phenomenological*:
it is always a succession of events, of little actions which are
described in a precise manner. And what interests me is just this
relation to the immediate look, with the how you look at these
little actions going on. And it is also a relation to strangeness.'¹⁶⁷

'I do think it's a feminist film because I give space to things
which were never, almost never, shown in that way, like the daily
gestures of a woman. They are the lowest in the hierarchy of film
images . . . But more than the content, it's because of the style.
If you choose to show a woman's gestures so precisely, it's because
you love them. In some way you recognise those gestures that
have always been denied and ignored.'¹⁶⁸

'But I indeed believe (even if we are not there yet, it's important
to say it, to know it) that if we manage to become really decolon-
ised, there can be a language that is women's, which is not more-
over the same for all women. There are things that are quite
stupid: for example, I am often asked why I set my camera so
low. It's probably linked to my size, quite simply, at what level
and from what point of view I look at things.'¹⁶⁹

'It's really a hard problem to try to say what differentiates a
woman's rhythm in film because a man can use these same forms
of expression . . . We speak of "women's rhythm", but it isn't
necessarily the same for all women. I also think that Hollywood
doesn't express a man's rhythm either, but the rhythm of capital-
ism or fascism. Men are cheated by it too.'¹⁷⁰

Passages quoted from interviews on her work given by Chantal
Akerman, brought together for the importance here of the simple
complexity – the *fineness* – of their commitment.

167 C Akerman, 'Entretien', *Cahiers du cinéma* n278, July 1977, p41.

168 C Akerman, 'Chantal Akerman on *Jeanne Dielman*', p118.

169 C Akerman, 'Entretien', p37.

170 C Akerman, 'Chantal Akerman on *Jeanne Dielman*', p121.

If hysterics suffer from reminiscences,¹⁷¹ the fiction film suffers from its reminiscence of the woman, its problem of memory, the memory it seeks to control, again and again. Women in their representation to men, for men, are the support of an economy which at the same time they trouble in the very difference they must represent. Hence the need to remember the place of the woman; hence the resistance that women produce in this economy, even from there ('an element of female resistance, if only a passive one, has always contributed to artistic production').¹⁷²

Another way of putting it: 'the psychoanalytic fact of the sexual difference of woman (the "lack", the fact of castration) is a nodal point in the structuration of classical narrative'.¹⁷³ Exactly, this is the problem of that narrative, the problem belonging to it, that is in its possession. The lack, the psychoanalytic fact of the sexual difference of woman, *works*, works for its representation. Which is not then to say that women are the unrepresentable – precisely the position of all this working, the assignment of the lack, the definition of the woman – but that the struggle is for another function and functioning of representation, that struggle being the resistance that women are in this order.'

'Resistance is the current state of an interpretation of the subject' (SII, p266). The narrative film has tried always to *complete* an interpretation of the subject (the image, the identity, it proposes, the reading of the spectator it maintains), resisting resistance as best it can, its best being the constant image, and of the woman.

One way of understanding what can be grasped as 'of women', against the image, is in terms of a negativity, a not-that, a process of disinterpretation: 'a woman's practice can only be negative with respect to what exists, saying "it's not that" and "it's not yet"'.¹⁷⁴ (But then the negativity has in turn to be understood as struggle and transformation, not allowed to pull back towards condition and essence – 'negative'/'positive', always the terms

171 Freud: 'Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences', *Studies on Hysteria*, p7.

172 Silvia Bovenschen, 'Is there a feminine aesthetic?', *New German Critique* n10, Winter 1977, p125.

173 *Camera Obscura* Collective, 'An interrogation of the cinematic sign: woman as sexual signifier in Jackie Raynal's *Deux fois*', p13 (*Camera Obscura* here refer to work done by Pam Cook and Claire Johnston, notably 'The place of women in the cinema of Raoul Walsh', in *Raoul Walsh* ed Phil Hardy, Edinburgh 1974, pp93-109).

174 Julia Kristeva, 'La femme, ce n'est jamais ça', *Tel Quel* n59, Autumn 1974, p21.

The sex of the 'author' of a film (book, painting, etc) cannot be confused with that negativity, with its effective operation (which is not to fail to recognise that the question of the sex is fundamental economically, socially, that there is the constant need to fight for the opening of the cultural production of meanings to women); nor can it be confused with the sexuality a film inscribes, the resistances it provokes (which is not to fail to recognise that it is the productions of women that now most challenge the given inscriptions). What is at stake is never the immediacy of a meaning directly expressed from the sex but always the terrain of representation and representing in which meanings are formed and instituted, offered and possessed, in which 'man' and 'woman', 'male' and 'female', 'masculine' and 'feminine' are defined, implicated.

Nothing in a film's organisation of sounds and images will allow it to be specified as *necessarily* having been made by a woman (by women) or by a man (by men); it is impossible, that is, to specify marks of cinematic enunciation that could *only* appear in films made *by* women or by men, that are *essentially* of a woman or of a man (this is the difficulty of the question that often occurs in debates: how can we know *from the film* that it is made by a woman or a man?). What one has is always a structure of representation in and from the terms of which positions, enunciations can be engaged, specified as 'masculine', 'feminine', with the possibility of reappropriating the latter as site of resistance to the domination, the definitions, the assignments of the former. (This is difficult, uneasy: when I see Carola Klein's *Mirror Phase*, for example, I do know from the film that it is made by a woman, the film-maker's voice comments the film in the first-person on the sound-track, she is identified as present in some of the shots; but I cannot point to anything in the production of the sounds and images, in the film's discursive organisation, that means it could not have been made by a man and the specification of the film-maker as a woman in the film could be a fiction; but yet in some way I do know it to be by a woman; but yet that knowing might be my implication in a reactionary identification of women with certain contents, certain themes; but yet again . . . and so on.)

Films by women cannot be pushed together in a simple equivalence, nor can those by men. To do so seems finally to deny difference, to come back to the function of the difference. The assumption of 'feminist' by the dominant ideology as a term of equivalence and containment might be one indication of this: the political and ideological force of feminism is countered as far as possible by its reduction to a 'sphere of women' with, behind

104 that, a return of the expression of the woman. The term 'sexist' can go the same way: given as the behaviour of men, thence of the man, it serves to assert an inevitable failing and to confuse, defensively, issues of the relations of individual and social and of their effective transformation ('all men are sexist' is a perfect alibi of men).

The representation of sexuality – 'masculine', 'feminine' – is one of the most dangerous operations of equivalence (in which psychoanalysis has played and plays its part), and it is no surprise that such representation should be the great problem, the great affair, of dominant cinema today (with its 'new sexuality'). A crucial question for any alternative practice is thus how *not* to contribute to this representation, how not to valorise its terms of identity and identification.

A crucial question underlying the last, that of the modes of possession, of ownership, of appropriation of images and sounds – in short, of the political problems of representation.¹⁷⁵

X

Cinema divides not in any immediate sense on men and women but on the positions and relations of meaning of 'man' and 'woman' in its representations and its production of those representations, the subjectivity – the history of the subject – it engages. From that emphasis, it is possible to take up in return something of the difficulties involved in developing an adequate understanding of the effective conjuncture of a film in cinema with the practice and experience of specific individuals and groups including groupings according to a primary distinction by sex as male or female.

Debate around particular films often stumbles over the issue of effectivity, 'the real effect of a film', deadlocks on notions of – on a choice between – either 'the text itself', its meanings 'in it', or else the text as non-existent other than 'outside itself', in the various responses it derives from any individual or audience; the text 'closed' or 'open'. The terms are weak on both sides: to hold that a given text is 'different for everybody' is as much the end of any consequent political analysis and practice as to hold that it is 'the same for everybody'; the implication of the latter is the possibility of a definitive analysis able to determine the use-value of a film in abstraction from the actual historical situations of its use; that of the former is a malleable transparency of the particular film to the determinations of the particular individual

175 Initial approach in S Heath, 'Questions of property', *Ciné-tracts* n4, 1978, pp2-11.

or audience, thus removing in the end all real basis for supporting 105
 through political-cultural analysis any film or films against any
 other or others. The extreme version of this last position is
 provided by Jonas Mekas's 'own final statement' on the films of
 Leni Riefenstahl: 'if you are an idealist, you will see idealism; if
 you are a classicist, you will see classicism; if you are a Nazi, you
 will see Nazism'¹⁷⁶ – and if you are caught up in an established
 bourgeois view of art as the accomplishment of a transcending
 universality, you will be concerned to refuse analysis of the ideo-
 logical constructions at stake in a film's discursive production and
 organisation. The idea that films can be pulled into more or less
 any ideological space – significantly enough, Mekas's alternative
 spaces, idealism and classicism, are entirely compatible with and
 utilised by Nazism – is itself perfectly abstract in the conception
 of freedom it posits, its forgetting of the determining and defining
 domination at any moment of specific ideologies, specific institu-
 tions of meaning, within the spaces of which are given the grounds
 of contradiction, mobilisation, reappropriation. More interesting
 and relevant in the present context is the question that can be
 elaborated from a comment by Agnès Varda expressing her reaction
 of liking to the woman in Jean-Louis Comolli's *La Cecilia*, 'I liked
 the woman in *La Cecilia*',¹⁷⁷ setting against it the frequent criti-
 cism voiced in debates by women and men of just this central
 woman figure. Is there a way to deal with difference in relations
 to a film without falling either into indifference, the simple asser-
 tion of the same, or into some pure difference, an apolitical
 singularity, the effects only of individual (and) event?

The reading of a film is neither constrained absolutely nor free ab-
 solutely but historical, that history including the determinations of
 the institution cinema, the conditions of the production of mean-
 ings, of specific terms of address in films, a film. The property of
 a film is not yours or mine, whether makers or spectators, nor
 its; it is in a number of instances of relations across the film's
 preconstruction, passage and construction that engage the spec-
 tator-subject in a multiplicity of levels of reading, reception,
 response.

It is possible with regard to a film or group of films to analyse
 a discursive organisation, a system of address, a placing – a con-
 struction – of the spectator (in its address, its placing, the film –
 to come back on Metz's formulation quoted earlier – does look
 to the spectator, does want to know his or her activity); the narra-
 tive fiction film of commercial cinema providing an example of

176 Jonas Mekas, cit Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in *Women and the Cinema*, p362.

177 A Varda, 'Entretien', *Cahiers du cinéma* n276, May 1977, p25.

106 address and placing at their most evidently regular and unifying. This is not to say, however, that any and every spectator – and for instance, man or woman, of this class or that – will be completely and equally in the given construction, completely and equally there in the film; and nor then is it to say that the discursive organisation and its production can exhaust – be taken as equivalent to – the effectivity, the potential effects, of a film. No film can impose simply the spectator it poses (poses from its reproduction of cinematic apparatus and institution down to the slightest elements of signification that it particularly envisages), can impose an absolutely constraining place of places; such a place being only ever the imaginary of the constructed spectator, a consistence from the symbolic which latter is always there in return in its excess of any unity, any subject consistence, always a process – ‘alienation’ and ‘separation’ – of the subject in relation of and to the Other that is the opening of a constant sliding and difference of meaning for – across – the individual subject (the film invites *me* to come in its place but that place is never where *I* can be, only the projection-identification of *me*, an effect of identity). A corollary of this is that different discursive organisations cannot be merely accepted at the face value – the identification – of their addressed difference. Thus, for example, while a film may be specified as engaging marxist and feminist issues, demonstrated indeed as constructing a marxist and feminist position, and supported in these terms, as a ‘marxist film’, a ‘feminist film’, there seems to be difficulty in finally labelling a film a ‘marxist film’ or a ‘feminist film’ since in this sense no film is anything (hence the possibility of the quite radical disagreements so often encountered as to whether or not this or that film should be so described – witness the arguments around *Riddles of the Sphinx*); to designate a film in this way, that is, can quickly come close to suggesting an essential unity and a single effectivity, definitively accomplished ‘in’ the film, at the expense of consideration of the realisable multiplicity of effects and the problems of that multiplicity in any concrete situation of the film (in which concrete situation it may nevertheless be politically vital to hold to the designation and argue for and from it).

The spectator addressed by a film is distinct from, is not equivalent to, the spectating individual, the individual in the act of spectatorship, who may come into its invited place. It should be stressed, moreover, that the spectator addressed by a film is a multiple rather than a single instance, though the discursive organisation of the film may accomplish a certain unification (for example, much recent work in film theory has been concerned to describe the effect of a spectator-subject of cinema – the apparatus, the institution – ‘before’ the spectator-subject of any particular film which reproduces that effect in – as part of – its own

terms of address).

The spectating individual is always an individual subject, 'subject' designating not an achieved unity, once and for all, but a construction and a process, a heterogeneity, an intersection of histories – social and individual (the latter in the sense in which psychoanalysis can be taken as specifying and describing the area of the history of the construction of the individual as subjectivity in the divisions, relations of the symbolic, these relations themselves always – remember the image of the recto and verso of a piece of paper – a social implication).

Every individual is the site of a singularity, the fact of his or her individual history. The social implication, the social formation, of all discursive systems, symbolic relations, in no way prevents the production and inscription of singular events – which events, which individual history, will be caught up in the reception of a film for any spectator (watching *The Collector*, I think I recognise such and such a street in Hampstead, wonder which was the last Wyler film I saw, am struck by a shade of yellow in a dress worn by Samantha Eggar whose name, and the colour of the dress, runs into a certain pattern of personal obsession, remember that Nabokov was also interested in butterflies, dislike something in Terence Stamp's appearance, and so on, interminably). Varda's 'I liked the woman in *La Cecilia*', formulated in that way, can be understood at this level of singularity (note the ambiguity – the clumsiness – of the habitual question of liking a film: 'did you like it?'; the whole problem of the 'you' – the 'I' – assumed as the subject of the liking).

'Production not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object.'¹⁷⁸ Everyone is the possibility of a difference in reading, reception, response (with that difference a plurality of differences across the 'one'), but the film is the same, a certain organisation, a certain address; the film, that is, offers something of a common terrain on which meanings are made and remade, assumed and displaced in any concrete situation of spectatorship, on which difference is represented, shifted, represented again in the difference of that shift for you and I.

Representation, with its senses of image, argumentation, deputation; the turn together – the bind of representing – of these various elements is important. The history of the individual as subject and as subject in and for a given social formation is never finished. Its constant termination, the stable relation of subject in constructed meaning, a specific subject-construction, is the effect of representation, and an ideological effect: any social formation depends for its existence not simply on the economic and political

178 K Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, London 1973, p92 (Marx is here discussing art).

108 instances but also on a reasoning of the individual as subject, reproduced in images, identities of meaning, finding his or her delegation there. The term of this process is suture, suture as representing: the join of the subject as unity of the recognition of sense, point of intelligibility; the achievement in representation of the bind of the spectator as subject-construction, as in possession (the representation 'for me', as 'mine'). Cinema is an institution of representing, a machine for the fabrication-maintenance of representation; it is as such that it is a crucial ideological investment, as such that it is developed and exploited for a narration of the subject in a narrative that is its mapping – again and again, the constant termination – in representation, on the grounds of existing representations and their new accommodations.

What was stressed in immediately preceding paragraphs was that the unity of the 'one' – I, you, he, she, man or woman – is a complex mesh of instances: the accident of the individual; the subject history of the realisation of the individual as subject in the division and relations of the symbolic, the production of the individual in structures of difference and desire; the subject-constructions of the discursive formations that are the representation-representing of the social, the individual in the social (a discourse is always a social relation, organising a coherence of desire, a conversion of subjectivity to the position and image of that coherence, its representation). The bind of representation, the representing, is its completion of address, exactly the effecting and effect of the 'for me', the 'mine', position as possession. It is that mesh of instances and the problem of their representation that cinema finds and returns in its films and their reading, reception, response, that is the site of its operation. A film, that is, is the production of a past for the subject, the spectator bound in time with the film, to the meanings it proposes, constructs to make sense of that time, occupying – entertaining – him or her, defining their possibilities; the regime of the narrative fiction film being simply that of the more or less *successful* past – hierarchisation and continuity of discursive organisation, imaginary of the 'one', assurance of the conversion of difference, desire, the slip of symbolic representation (the subject a process of the signifier, 'a signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier') into an order of sign and subject possession ('a sign represents something for someone') – the film functioning as a mode of exchange of subjects, a universal representative, the standard of the 'one'; which universality, which standard for any subject, is its representing operation.

Alternative practices are then alternative insofar as they transform the relations of the symbolic in representation *against* representing, against the universalising conditions of exchange: representation held to use (a definition of Brechtian distancing); to another difference again, division, disunity, disturbance of the

(social) contract (of cinema, film, the spectator). There is a politics of 'reality' and its struggle is in representation and its institutions, passes across the subject represented, the representing holds of meaning. 109

Nowhere perhaps is that struggle more important today than in the 'reality' of sexual difference and the stabilisation of sexuality there, in the representation of difference and the representing of men and women as that, the hold of the difference. Men and women may be differentiated on the basis of biological sex but that differentiation is always a position in representation, a specification of the individual as subject in meaning (and from the very earliest of interpellations, the 'it's a boy'/'it's a girl', where 'boy' and 'girl' are the terms of a whole force of representation-representing); the individual is a sexed being in representation, always represented in his or her sexuality. Psychoanalysis demonstrates the body as tissue of signifiers, desire as a function of division in the symbolic difficult to sexualise as male or female, but the relations of tissue, desire, division are always immediately returning in representation, with, exactly, a structure of sexual division, a sexualised representation of desire, a specific order of difference.

The problem of representation for psychoanalysis, barely posed by it as such but there in occasional debates as to status, is the Oedipus complex. The radical weight of Lacan's work is that the law of castration passes through the symbolic not through the Oedipal structure as foundation of the unconscious. The latter is a concept forged on the trace of what operates to constitute a subject and the constitution of the subject is its division in the symbolic, the movement of desire from there, in that division-constitution. Man and woman, mother and child are signifiers, terms in particular representations, not contents, not even the contents of a founding Oedipus complex. What is important is the promotion of the function of castration in the constitution of the subject, not the form of that promotion which is culturally variable ('the Oedipus is finally only *one cultural form* amongst others, which are equally possible provided that they accomplish the same function, *the promotion of the function of castration in the psyche*').¹⁷⁹ But that formulation is itself still inadequate if it merely replaces one universalised structure by another, the Oedipus complex by castration, is inadequate inasmuch as it refuses to face the question of the representation in which it is implicated and which it implicates in the very moment of its attempt to specify the universal function. The unconscious is not anatomical, from a given division of the sexes, but symbolic, from a division of the individual as subject in language, meaning, difference; the

179 M Safouan, *Etudes sur l'Oedipe*, Paris 1974, p124.

110 production of the sexual reality of the unconscious ('the reality of the unconscious is sexual reality', *SXI*, p138)¹⁸⁰ then being precisely that, a *production*. The function of castration may stand as the term of that production, the articulation – 'integration' (*SXI*, p138)¹⁸¹ – of symbolic and sexual division but at every stage of the appeal to that term its specific representation-representing of that articulation must be grasped and its own position within the existing order of representation understood accordingly.

Contemporary with cinema, rooted in the novel (the very form of so many case histories), psychoanalysis is itself, and powerfully, an institution of representation, another family machine. The family, indeed, is the historical site and difficulty of psychoanalysis, the area of its investigations of subjectivity and of the effective structures of sexuality for the individual subject, of the fit of the Oedipus complex, and the point of the limitation of the terms of its descriptions, the problem of its own representations and their permanent displacement by the activity of the unconscious which it both knows and constantly misses (it may be that those great and embarrassing anthropological and cultural works of Freud's later years are to be read, find their real force of sense, in this context). Not simply a reflection of the state, the family is a specific production of sexuality, of language, of ideology, the realisation of the individual subject, locus of representation, his or her representing. Psychoanalysis discovers and understands the fundamental instability of production and realisation – process, division, unconscious, desire, the interminability of the subject in meaning, the slip of representation – but the Oedipus becomes the representation of that discovery and understanding, a new machine that reassures the same identifications, the same novelistic in which cinema is invested, the same difference – that of the man and the woman in the order of the phallus with its symbolic presence, its certainty of vision, its image of the woman from castration, troubling, enigmatic, but fixed in his gaze, and as that enigma, like the statue of Teresa, the mystery of the woman to be seen, in all its evidence, for the man, for him.

* * *

In many ways this piece has come back over the last sections of the 'Notes on suture' that accompanied the translations of articles by Miller and Oudart in a recent *Screen*.¹⁸² At the close of those notes, I indicated a need to examine more carefully the concept

180 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p150.

181 *Ibid*, p150.

182 'Notes on suture', *Screen* v18 n4, Winter 1977/78, pp48-76; see also 'Anata mo', *Screen* v17 n4, Winter 1976/77, pp49-66.

of the history of the subject; the present piece can be regarded 111
as a contribution to such an examination.

Thus it may be placed in a certain project of work, given something of a justification – an inevitability – in that place. And I am really concerned to stress that it does continue previous work, since the criticism it makes of Lacanian-Freudian psychoanalysis should be read and remembered in conjunction with the earlier attempts to define and use the radical aspects of psychoanalysis (in fact, the criticism is often made on the basis of that definition and use, in terms of those radical aspects). Places, however, are full of imaginary coherence and the writing of this piece for me has exceeded simple continuation, has been more difficult.

Difficult for me, for me not a woman. Throughout, the topic of difference involves quite centrally issues that are feminist issues; the piece, the idea of which has been pressing me for a year or so, crystallised indeed as an immediate commitment during a weekend conference in the area of film led by a feminist collective (*Camera Obscura*) and is situated directly in relation to feminist work in *Screen* (most notably and obviously Mulvey's 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema') and outside (for example, the discussion of *Riddles of the Sphinx* at The Other Cinema initiated by women connected with what at one stage had been known as the Lacan Study Group). The real pressure of the writing of the piece was in that context, or, to put it another way and more exactly, the continuation of previous work was under the pressure of that context, its problems and questions.

Which too is the context of the difficulty, what I experience as the impossibility of the position of writing of someone not a woman in direct discussion of those problems and questions. I can know the issues to be fundamental, politically and theoretically unavoidable for men as for women, can find them constantly in my work, feel it to be neither correct nor possible to ignore or somehow get round them or ease out with vague expressions of sympathy but, at the same time, to engage them is at once this difficulty of writing, of my return in discourse as a certain possession, the representing of me for the reader and to myself as a certain position, a confidence of knowledge or – probably and – a problematic appropriation of feminist criticisms, voices, yet another stratagem of oppression. For instance, a little example, in section VIII I bring together some quotations from interviews with Chantal Akerman; those quotations together at that point are very important – very real – for me; simple but complex, they summarise and extend much of what I have been trying to say, and in addition (or first and foremost) I like them, not least because they pay no attention to the currently received truths of intellectualism, also because of the space they create, because of the particular mix of the theoretical and the personal, and so on. The best word I have to describe the effect of these quotations,

112 the word I want to use, is 'finess'; for me they have just that effect, and I hope too for the reader. Yet as I write 'finess', I cannot prevent the return from the enunciation of a representation in which it and I as subject are held as a position of domination, as in the difference from which women are placed from men, a representation that makes the word patronising or containing or whatever (and I cannot deny this by advancing my contrary intention, discourse pays no heed to intentions which it anyway defines in its relations, and my contrary intention is anyway already suspect, itself discursively defined and produced and positioned within an order that I wish to be against . . .).

'For in fact, we do not exactly know "masculine" language. As long as men claim to say everything and define everything, how could we know what the language of the male sex is?'¹⁸³ The notion of the language of a sex, difference as the difference there, has been critically at issue here but this piece has nevertheless followed something of the logic of Irigaray's question and its terms. What it has done, tried to do, is to pose the problem of sexual difference and representation and the functioning of the production of representation as the fixing of the difference, the relation of the woman as that, and then to come back from there on the indifference of the existing order, the sameness it asserts through that very fixing of difference, grounding and masking a male domination, at the expense of women and of other relations for men in meaning to sexual difference.

183 Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p127.

The Avant-Garde Histories and Theories

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(for the *Camera Obscura* collective)

I

In the introduction to *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema*,¹ one of several scholarly treatments of avant-garde film published in the last three or four years, Marilyn Singer emphasises that avant-garde film requires both a new criticism and a new way of looking at film. Enough American critical work now exists on experimental film to enable us to ask if and to what degree it is essentially a new kind of criticism and a new way of looking at film.

Whether known as 'underground', 'independent', 'experimental' or 'avant-garde', this kind of film, produced outside the industry, usually by a single person, almost always on a very low budget, offers distinct challenges to film criticism which for the most part has concentrated either on Hollywood commercial cinema or, at most, on 'art-house' films like those of Fellini, Antonioni and Bergman. The sixties marked a consolidation of American avant-garde film activity. The success of the film co-ops helped regularise distribution, the growth of film studies in the university insured a large and serious audience. Anthology Film Archives, exclusively devoted to the avant-garde film, established itself in New York, and the work of the film-makers came to be powerful enough to demand consideration in the context of other American modernist art. Film-makers like Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, Ernie Gehr, Joyce Wieland and Barry Gerson developed an international reputation and experimental film, itself influenced by

1 *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde*, P Adams Sitney, Oxford University Press, 1974.

114 minimalism and post-minimalism, began to influence the other arts.

All of the recent criticism is a response to this flourishing of American independent film, and, even though scholarly, sees itself as having an active function of supporting this film-making activity and of making the films more widely accessible, both physically and intellectually. Within the formal rigour of this critical work appears a necessary and important promotional tone. However, the desire to legitimise the critical object is bound to insinuate itself into the methodology – something which up to now has not been sufficiently considered by even the most theoretically-orientated of the new approaches to the avant-garde film. This is not at all to say that active public support for this kind of cinema, and theoretical work on it should be kept separate. But the desire to ‘prove’, for example, that these films are as sophisticated as other modernist art activity, that they have irrevocably changed the face of *all* art, and that they are the most successful form for 20th century epistemological inquiry is going to inflect any presentation of these films’ conceptual strategies and material realisations. As Christian Metz points out in his self-ironic analysis of the meta-psychology of the film analyst,² any critical discourse attempting to valorise the object does not address the *properties* of cinematic language *per se*; these properties are offered instead to us as ‘resources’, ‘riches’, ‘means of expression’, this vocabulary revealing a very different project from that of an analysis of how film functions.

We see this problem most clearly in *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*.³ Can a project involving definitively establishing ‘the monuments of cinematic art’ (Introduction, *pv*), a project whose stated criteria, determined in advance, are that the films be ‘sublime achievements’ and exhibit ‘wholeness’ and ‘unity’ (Introduction, *passim*), be compatible with evolving a theory of film, or even a new kind of criticism? *The Essential Cinema* permits any critical approach as long as each article substantiates the quality of its chosen monument: Seymour Stern’s passionate anecdotal piece on the making of Griffith’s *Intolerance* in which he offers the remarkable argument that ‘*Intolerance*, like *The Birth of a Nation*, was produced and exhibited in entire independence of the Hollywood film industry; although made in Hollywood, it was not of Hollywood.’ (p37); Ken Kelman’s thematic readings of Buñuel, Vigo, and Bresson, his most controversial position being that Buñuel’s early

2 ‘The Imaginary Signifier’, *Screen* v16 n2, Summer 1975, p24.

3 *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*, edited by P Adams Sitney, New York University Press and Anthology Film Archives, 1975. (A 130 page bibliography on the films in Anthology’s collection is included as an appendix.)

films like *L'Age d'Or* and *Land Without Bread* were neither 'social criticism' nor 'revolutionary' but that all of the seemingly 'socially conscious' scenes are actually only 'counterpoint or background to the main theme and action of love.' (p122); P Adams Sitney's rhetorical analysis of Bresson's *Pickpocket* in which he catalogues the devices Bresson uses to present his metaphysic of predestination and acquisition of grace; and Annette Michelson's explicitly phenomenological approach in which she argues that the important shift in Dziga Vertov's work was from 'the articulation of a comprehensive and dialectical view of the world to the exploration of the terrain of consciousness itself' (p100), that is, his evolution from an attempt at a historical materialist analysis to the concerns of phenomenology as epistemological enterprise: 'that philosophical phantasm of the reflexive consciousness, the eye seeing, apprehending itself through its constitution of the world's visibility.' (p98.)

A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema,⁴ is much more homogenous and coherent in terms of its methodology even though its primary function, too, is to present and explicate films which are almost all in the collection of Anthology Film Archives, ie those films in the constellation of avant-garde masterpieces as according to Anthology Film Archives. But it is a new criticism? One can see immediately in these articles the much more important influence of the rigorous and thoroughgoing formalist art criticism of the sixties (eg *Artforum*) than that of literary criticism which has up until now been the base of film criticism. Not only the careful descriptive mode, but the categories (when discussing the later 'structural' films) are those of the sixties criticism responding to minimalist and post-minimalist artwork: the function of repetition and other non-causal strategies, the devaluation of interpretation as a mode of viewing, the elimination of psychological interiority, the focus on the spectator's conscious relation to his or her own perceptual and logical activities, the shift of interest away from referential illusion, and an attention to the materials and processes specific to the medium.

But in order to characterise this 'new criticism', this 'new way of looking at film', it is necessary to recall the influence of the work of Annette Michelson on these critics, for the most part either her colleagues or former students. Michelson's approach to film, whether in analyses of Vertov, Eisenstein, Brakhage or Snow, has been explicitly phenomenological. She sees film as the 20th century medium for epistemological inquiry. For her, as a phenomenological critic, the power of film is its striking capacity to serve as a grand metaphor of vision used to trace out the essence of all the activities of consciousness. As she says, 'Epistem-

⁴ *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, The American Federation of Arts, 1976.

116 . ological inquiry and cinematic experience converge, as it were, in reciprocal mimesis.⁵ To take a specific example of her phenomenological methodology at work in her analysis of Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, she says of the 45-minute 'zoom' of which the film is comprised: 'The film is a projection of a grand reduction; its "plot" is the tracing of spatio-temporal *données*, its "action" the movement of the camera as the movement of consciousness.'⁶ In the work of Michelson, as well as that of P Adams Sitney, the phenomenological approach is not meant to be an exterior analysis 'applied' to the film; for them, it is a description of both the intentional efforts of the film-makers and an analysis of the *nature* of film; in other words, their critical discourse justifies itself by the belief that their methodology mirrors filmic processes and that film is the perfect phenomenological scene: Merleau-Ponty called film the 'phenomenological art'.⁷ In *Visionary Film* P Adams Sitney finds an historical base for this in the work of Maya Deren: 'The potential for a phenomenology of cinema, which is implied in the notes on *Meditations on Violence*, later came to be realised by Stan Brakhage and Michael Snow, among others, whose achievements can, in part, be traced back to Maya Deren's vision.' (p29.) Sitney refers to the American avant-garde as 'mythologists of consciousness' (p332); on Sidney Peterson: 'It is specifically his use of radical techniques as metaphors for perception and consciousness . . . that elaborates Deren's central contribution . . .' (p55); on Gregory Markopoulos: 'The ultimate aspiration of Markopoulos' form has been the mimesis of the human mind. In different degrees and in different ways this might be the aim of the American avant-garde film-maker in general' (p142); on Snow: 'In *Back and Forth* (1969) and *The Central Region* (1971) the film-maker elaborates on the metaphor of the moving camera as an imitation of consciousness.' (p419.)

Throughout *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* we see the same emphasis. Writing of Maya Deren's *A Study on Choreography for the Camera* Lucy Fisher says: 'Thus the fluid transitions of Beatty's dance movements seem to stand as analogues for the movements of consciousness' (p73); Stuart Liebman describes Brakhage's 'great project' as 'the representation of the movements of consciousness itself' (p97); Fred Camper insists that Jordan Belson's films are 'not images at all, but forms of consciousness' (p125); Ellen Feldman: 'The use of persistence of vision becomes the foundation for creating an analogy between the processes of viewing film and that of consciousness' (p149) and

5 'Toward Snow', *Artforum*, June 1971, p30.

6 *Ibid*, p32.

7 'The Film and the New Psychology', M Merleau-Ponty, Lecture to the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques, March 13, 1945, trans in *Sense and Non-sense*, North-Western University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1964, pp48-59.

'the film structure functions as both analogue and an instant of consciousness.' (p149.) In *The Essential Cinema*, Ken Kelman will add his voice to Michelson's and Sitney's in stating that Buñuel's *Land Without Bread* 'is a film concerned with consciousness . . .' (p125) and that the process of Bruce Conner's *Report* is 'analogous to the process of thought . . .' (p241). Phenomenology thus permeating all the new writing on avant-garde film, what sort of consequences does this have in terms of developing a methodology (methodologies) of film analysis? And further, how does this sort of criticism relate to current developments in theoretical work on film?

A *History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* and *The Essential Cinema* for the most part consist of descriptions of films. Although the descriptions are often careful and rigorous in their demonstration of these films as 'analogues of consciousness' and/or subversions of filmic illusionism through consciousness, they seldom go beyond that.⁸ But then, methodology is not a problem in a phenomenological approach: 'It is a matter of describing and not of explaining or analysing.' Phenomenology aims at a 'report (*compte rendu*) of space, time, of the "lived" world . . . It is also the attempt at a direct description of our experience as it is without respect to psychological genesis and causal explanation . . .'⁹ This approach differs from much of the recent work in film theory which concentrates on the construction of abstract systems in order to understand the mechanisms of the film such as the notion of codes and their hierarchies in the filmic system (eg the important distinction between specific and non-specific codes), and of 'textual system', not the reconstruction of the system of the film but a construction by the analyst of a system of the film according to the level and purpose of the analysis. That this degree of abstraction is able to remain close to the film can be seen in the work of, for example, Thierry Kuntzel¹⁰ in which semiological and psychoanalytic structures are worked in close relation to a minute description of the temporal engenderment of the film.

Much of the French and English theoretical work on film, a semiology informed by psychoanalytic theory, has concerned itself with phenomenology and cinema, but from a very different

8 P Adams Sitney however makes a provocative link between phenomenology in cinema and American experimental film as a grand Romantic metaphor in his study of the 'visionary' film, a type of film which he sees as predominant throughout the history of the American avant-garde (*Visionary Film*, p422). Although he merely notes it, this might be one of the more fruitful approaches to take to the question of the resemblances between cinema and the phenomenological scene.

9 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, Paris 1945, pii.

10 Cf eg 'Le défilement: A view in close-up' *Camera Obscura* n2, 1978.

118 direction. Both Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz have discussed the similarity between cinema and phenomenology. In 'The Imaginary Signifier' Metz says that 'it is true that the topographical apparatus of the cinema resembles the conceptual apparatus of phenomenology, with the result that the latter can cast light on the former' (p55).¹¹ What is also true is that the tautological structure of experimental films mirrors the phenomenological *gestalt*: the films are 'about' the spectator's spatio-temporal traversal of the film. Metz states that it is 'no accident that the main form of idealism in cinematic theory has been phenomenology.'¹² For both Baudry and Metz, it is not that cinema just happens miraculously to work like human perception (and like the psychical apparatus, eg projection, mirror structure, etc); a certain wish-fulfilling placement of the spectator is implicit in the structure of the cinematic institution, the institution including the industry, the technological base and the spectator's 'desire to go to the cinema.' Cinema replays unconscious wishes the structures of which are shared by phenomenology: the illusion of perceptual mastery with the effect of the creation of a transcendental subject.

The American criticism discussed here takes the phenomenological *gestalt* of cinema, and of avant-garde film in particular, for granted, both theoretically and historically. It takes its critical cues from what it has determined to be the nature of film and especially of these films. Thus, everyone is in agreement. The filmmakers write their *Metaphors on Vision* (Brakhage), Snow will talk of his project of making a film (*Wavelength*) that would be 'a definitive statement of pure film space and time . . . all about seeing',¹³ Warhol will remind us to 'just look'. The films themselves will be seen as the exemplary phenomenological event by their very nature. Criticism's function will be to refine our seeing and affirm the modernist credo of knowledge through self-consciousness. The discourse about the object becomes (is the same thing as) the discourse of the object.

Another direct consequence of this phenomenological approach is its elimination of consideration of the spectator's unconscious relation to the film, the screen, the entire viewing situation, an aspect that has received much attention in French and English film theory. When the unconscious is discussed in this recent

11 Metz, op cit. Cf his description of the resemblance between the subject in phenomenology and cinema: 'The "there is" of phenomenology proper (philosophical phenomenology) as an ontic revelation to a perceiving-subject (= "perceptual *cogito*"), to a subject for which alone there can be anything, has close and precise affinities with the inauguration of the cinematic signifier in the ego as I have tried to define it, with the spectator falling back on himself as a pure instance of perception, the whole of the perceived being "over the way".'

12 *Ibid*, p54.

13 Catalogue, 1967 International Film Festival of Knokke-le-Zoute.

American work, it is either brought in as an example of one of the possible 'states of consciousness' presented by the film, or is incorrectly referred to as the 'subconscious', thus eliminating the radicalness of Freud's notion of the unconscious as alterity. 119

As a first step towards a theory of film there is a sense in which a phenomenological approach can be seen as essential. We are still getting to know this object 'film'. Any discipline must have a basis in careful description. The books under discussion often do an excellent job of written re-presentation of the films, often complex, requiring long hours of close work in projection rooms, at the editing table. Hopefully this 'phenomenology of cinema', even though limited to a descriptive mode, to an overly-confining model of film as an 'analogue of consciousness' (thus eliminating consideration of the spectator's unconsciousness processes), can still serve an important first step, its mirroring exaltation of the film gradually giving way to a desire and an impetus to develop critical tools going beyond description into an analysis of the aesthetic, psychical and social functioning of cinema.

CONSTANCE PENLEY

II

Definitions of avant-garde or experimental cinema have always been controversial because they have always presupposed value judgements; even those offered in the most recent histories provoke the kinds of counter-examples which imply conflicting opinions about what counts as avant-garde cinema. Likewise, theories about what avant-garde film-making is, has been, or should be, which are often formulated in terms of film's alleged essential properties, also verge toward polemics, especially since the major theorists have been film-makers with incompatible views about the purposes and formal possibilities of cinematic innovation: Vertov, Eisenstein, Kuleshov, Dovzhenko, Epstein, Delluc, Léger, L'Herbier, Clair, Deren, Brakhage, Markopoulos, Peterson, Kubelka, Dreyer, Bresson, Godard, Frampton, Sharits, LeGrice, Gidal, Mulvey and Wollen, among others. Such a grouping of names challenges the oppositional distinctions which historians of the American avant-garde cinema commonly hold as definitive, namely: 16mm/35mm (amateur vs. professional film gauge and equipment); non-commercial/commercial; non-narrative/narrative; formalist/political; and sometimes also: abstract/representational; exclusion of language/use of language. Despite the long history of arguments (today as heated as ever) over what avant-garde might mean in connection with film, and in particular what socially generalisable meanings might be compatible with such arguments, American histories of avant-garde film have largely resolved such conflicts in terms of a formalist, anti-Hollywood stance, and an apprecia-

12C tion of the artist's personal vision in order to incorporate it into a history of stylistic innovation. The lack of discord which such histories present will seem more important later in this piece when the institutional web binding these views together is made more explicit.

If one approaches the books under discussion for a definition of avant-garde, what answer is given?

When 'avant-garde' is used to describe an artistic movement such as Cubism, it means that the movement is, for a time, *ahead of* critical acceptance. But when Cubism becomes absorbed into the mainstream of the tradition, it is no longer avant-garde. In connection with cinema, however, avant-garde does not mean 'in advance of' a developing film tradition; it is taken to mean, rather, *apart from* the commercial cinema. The avant-garde cinema is almost always seen – especially by its own historians – in terms of a development completely separate from that of the history of cinema. It is seen in terms of the 'art world' (painting, graphics, music, poetry, sometimes architecture) rather than the 'entertainment industry'. Thus John Hanhardt (associate curator of film at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York) defines avant-garde film in his introductory essay to *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* as 'the expression of an artist engaged in such vanguard aesthetic movements as surrealism, cubism, abstract expressionism or minimalism. This cinema subverts cinematic conventions by exploring the medium and its properties and materials, and in the process creates its own history separate from that of the classical narrative cinema' (op cit, p21).

Hanhardt's definition brings together the two major approaches to avant-garde cinema. It is discussed both through *comparison* with modernism, especially in the visual arts (as non-narrative), and in *opposition* to narrative cinema (as anti-narrative). In *The Cubist Cinema*,¹⁴ Standish Lawder says that Cubism 'was a revolution in the manner of seeing. The real content of the Cubist painting was an analysis of vision. The object, that is, what was seen, became virtually unimportant' (p67). Modernist art – and modernist criticism – emphasises the work of the signifier; but such work is discounted if it is organised around specific meanings. Thus Hanhardt warns his readers that, although the Surrealists loved *Potemkin*, and although Lawder can draw a formal comparison between Leger's *Ballet Mécanique* and the highly abstracted cream-separator sequence from Eisenstein's *The Old and the New*, 'it is important to remember, however, that for Eisenstein abstract imagery was used only in the service of the narrative, not as an end in itself' (p35).

14 *The Cubist Cinema* New York University Press, 1975.

Insofar as modernism is a modern formalism, it is by definition opposed to the possibility of a political avant-garde, which is necessarily concerned with meanings. Eisenstein is considered by formalist critics only in terms of formal innovation. His extensive theoretical work, all of which is explicitly concerned with how to present specific configurations of meaning to the spectator through particular kinds of formal choices, is selectively reduced by Hanhardt to being 'about editing (montage), composition, and a range of other basic issues' (p35). It is well known that Vertov's work has also been seen both as a model for avant-garde political filmmaking (Godard-Gorin's Dziga Vertov Group, for example) and as a treasury of formalist strategies.

On the other hand, the second part of Hanhardt's definition – 'this cinema subverts cinematic conventions by exploring the medium and its properties and materials' – refers to 'radical formalism', which represents an attempt to talk about a political avant-garde – or the avant-garde as political – while still restricting analysis to the play of the signifiers. Through the notion of deconstruction, this is now the most prevalent anti-narrative approach. It is argued that films which successfully work against (deconstruct) the dominant narrative conventions operate radical changes on conventional viewing habits and provoke a more distanced, critical spectator. The work of Noël Burch, in this connection, has been important and controversial.¹⁵ However, basic problems with the conception of this notion have also encouraged its use as a gauge to measure formal innovation *per se* (a film is avant-garde insofar as it deconstructs), in which case inventories of deconstruction strategies are compiled with little attention as to how they progressively engender and govern textual movement or what the point of these strategies might be beyond creating an awareness of film-as-film. It is just this confusion about what 'radical' means in conjunction with formalism that permits definitions like Hanhardt's to conflate modernism and deconstruction.

Mixed in with the predominantly formalist orientation of contemporary avant-garde film criticism, and consistent with the anti-Hollywood stance, is the equation of avant-garde film with 'film-as-art' by nearly all its critics and historians. This equation has inverse consequences for commercial film, with rare exceptions. The Anthology Film Archives' manifesto, published as the introduction to *The Essential Cinema*, states that '... the art of the cinema surfaces primarily when it divests itself of commercial norms. The narrative commercial films included in our collection represent radical exceptions, cases where art has emerged despite the conditions of production and popular expectation' (px). (A list

15 See especially *Afterimage* n5 and Stephen Heath's criticisms in *Screen* v17 n3, Autumn 1976.

122 of the films in the collection is included in *The Essential Cinema*.) Although Anthology's selection committee describe their position as polemical, this attitude – which pits avant-garde film against commercial film as qualitative opposites – pervades almost all writing on avant-garde film depending on a constant analogy with the visual arts. The rhetoric of this criticism insists on an opposition between film as the expression of the artist's personal vision (or individual statement) versus a factory-produced market commodity (Hanhardt: 'factory = studio' (p20)) where film's visual and poetic qualities are sacrificed for a linear and verbalised plot.

Sarris' American *auteur* theory, of course, which was published in *Film Culture*, the house organ of American avant-garde cinema, attempted to re-evaluate (and elevate) Hollywood cinema precisely in terms of personal vision. For Steve Dwoskin, who argues for avant-garde film in similar terms in *Film Is*,¹⁶ virtually everything except Hollywood cinema is avant-garde including the French New Wave, Italian Neo-realism, the British Free Cinema, and 'film as a political weapon' – Godard and Marker in France, Rocha and Brazilian *cinema novo*, Cuban film, American Newsreel, among others. Although in *Visionary Film*, P Adams Sitney refuses the simplistic denial of the least Hollywood influence on American avant-garde film-makers and consistently draws attention to classical narrative conventions used and reworked, in particular by Anger, Markopoulos, Cornell, and Jacobs (such as the use of composition in depth, the off-screen look, the eye-line match, and more general editing and fictional strategies), it is only in David Curtis' *Experimental Cinema*¹⁷ that the monolithic view of Hollywood gives way to a discussion of experiments within the industry itself. While brief, this is still the best general history available, and the only one to extend the frame of reference beyond the 'art world' to take into consideration social and economic reasons determining the availability of low-cost equipment, processing and distribution.

None of these habitual ways of describing avant-garde film pre-supposes a theory which could actually account for its specific characteristics, nor, certainly, which could distinguish film-as-art from film that isn't art, nor, presumably, which could clarify what is meant by personal vision. Anthology's proposal – 'to define the art of the film in terms of selected works which indicate its essences and perimeters' (pvi) – is put in terms of recognised works, not theoretical principles. So it will be more appropriate to consider what films these histories take as their subject. *Visionary Film* and *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* are the first critical histories of American avant-garde film, and together with *The Essential Cinema* are based on the holdings of

16 *Film Is*, London 1975.

17 *Experimental Cinema*, London 1971.

Anthology Film Archives. Although neither claim to be exhaustive or definitive, they discuss very nearly the same film-makers and cover the same years, placing the beginning in 1943 with Deren and Hamid's *Mesher of the Afternoon* and continuing through the early seventies with structural/minimal films – Snow, Gehr, Sharits, Frampton, among others. This tacit critical and institutional consensus creates the impression that an official canon of important works and film-makers has already been decided. A *History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* is closely identified with the Whitney Museum, which is one of the major New York avant-garde showcases, through John Hanhardt, who chose the films to be described in the history and wrote the introductory essay. Virtually all the essays, including Hanhardt's, were written by former students of the New York University (NYU) Cinema Studies Department. Sitney, who until fairly recently taught at NYU, is the director of publications and one of the founders and board members of Anthology Film Archives, and has long been associated with Jonas Mekas, another co-founder of Anthology, through their work together on *Film Culture* magazine.

Aside from the American avant-garde's pride in its unclassifiable diversity, this critical agreement is controversial because the histories are based on a single and avowedly idiosyncratic collection. Anthology states in its introductory manifesto that it intends to collect only masterpieces of film art. Elsewhere, film archives, as opposed to fine arts museums, attempt to collect (ie preserve) as many films as possible on the principle that present critical standards will, in time, give way to others. The fact that there is such consensus on the 'sublime achievements' (Anthology's phrase) of the American avant-garde according to the first scholarly books devoted to it suggests that a particular corpus and a particular interpretation of its development are quickly becoming standardised, thus threatening the critical recognition of those films which are not included. This kind of influence is not restricted to New York. To take just one European example, the new Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (the Beaubourg) bought virtually Anthology's entire collection as its foundation collection of experimental film.

In addition to these general considerations, each of these books has certain debatable features. A *History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* is limited by its conception as a museum catalogue designed to accompany a travelling exhibit of 'film art'. Each essay describes and comments on the films apparently chosen arbitrarily as representative of seven 'periods' of American avant-garde film history. The expressed aims of this collection – to develop a new criticism to deal with a new art object – are discussed above by Constance Penley. In comparison, *Visionary Film* covers far more films and is much more substantial in every way. It represents the

124 first serious attempt to present a unified history of the American avant-garde film, and has provoked controversy for five main reasons: (a) Sitney's thesis that the most appropriate critical approach to 'visionary cinema' is to see it and Abstract Expressionism in terms of Romantic poetics; (b) the vagueness and indirect presentation of the key critical terms Sitney introduces, especially 'visionary' film and his genre categories (trance, mythopoeia, lyric, graphic, picaresque, structural, and participatory film); (c) the typology of genres: Sitney's history sees a progressive development of avant-garde genres out of one another (a 'historical morphology'); (d) the chapter on structural film which loops the development of the American avant-garde back to Deren and the subjective film, suggesting that the structural film is motivated by the same Romantic quest for self-discovery; and (e) Sitney's suggestion throughout that 'the great unacknowledged aspiration of the American avant-garde film has been the cinematic reproduction of the human mind' (p408). *Visionary Film* is an important book because of the attention given to avant-garde film theory, which had received little critical attention before this. Even Deren's writings, though always acknowledged, have been viewed superficially, and Markopoulos' extremely interesting ideas about experimental narration are virtually unknown outside of the readers of *Film Culture*. From Sitney one gets a sense of the great diversity of options beyond what is usually flattened into an anti-Hollywood or film-as-art stance which American avant-garde film-makers have considered, attempted, and very often written about. Hopefully *Visionary Film* will stimulate further and more systematic work on particular areas of film theory and history, and on textual studies of individual films.

Although Anthology's collection discussed and detailed in *The Essential Cinema* (edited of course by Sitney) makes narrative exceptions, predictably enough, for what has traditionally been seen as art cinema – the 'sublime achievements' of a Bresson for example – it excludes such film-makers as Godard, Straub and Huillet, Duras, Rainer, Akerman, Rivette, Mulvey and Wollen, among many others whose films constitute another direction, and an extremely vital one, of contemporary avant-garde film-making. Because they combine commercial and non-commercial aspects, narrative and non-narrative, and are constituted in different ways as political cinema, these films stand in contrast to prototypes of 'pure cinema', at any rate as they have usually been discussed. This exclusion is all the more interesting in that it parallels a blind spot in American avant-garde film criticism as well, which though it seems like a methodological hodge-podge, is nonetheless unified through the priority given to formal description and the total absence of reference to film as a discursive practice. It is this combination of characteristics which permit one to call it formalist: a film's structure and formal properties are described step by

step, outside any consideration of audience, social context, or the operations by which meaning is produced by and for the spectator. Sitney, for one, is interested in establishing a homology of structures between the American avant-garde film and 'the mind', but what those mental structures are is never made explicit.

A very important set of questions never arises in this criticism, central among which concerns filmic enunciation. According to Emile Benveniste, 'what characterises enunciation in general is the emphasis on the discursive relationship with a partner, whether it be real or imagined, individual or collective.'¹⁸ What we think of as the classical, Hollywood-style fiction film tends to efface the marks of its construction (the organising half of the discursive relationship), as well as direct references to the spectator. Therefore the crucial question in determining the relationship of the spectator to the filmic discourse, how he or she is placed and thereby understands it, becomes: who 'speaks' beneath the deceptively neutral and objective voice of the 'third person' narration. In other words, according to what logic(s) does the film make sense? In whose interest are the images and sounds recorded and ordered in a specific way, as one particular textual system? Who controls the look, and with it, the diegesis, and what kind of spectator does this presuppose? The same questions can be asked of *Wavelength*, *Marnie* or *Comment ça va*, a film in which they are discussed directly by the film's characters.

One way to characterise this group of film-makers is to say that they all investigate and analyse the question 'who speaks': the point of view from which the narrative is organised is specified, although the kind of address to the spectator differs vastly with each film. They also work explicitly with and against conventions governing different kinds of discourse in an attempt to reshape cinematic and, with varying degrees of directness, social conventions. One way to look at differences among them – as examples, think of Straub and Huillet's *Fortini-Cani*, Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, Duras' *India Song*, Akerman's *News From Home*, Mulvey and Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx*, Rainer's *Film About a Woman Who . . .*, Godard's *Comment ça va* – is to consider which discourses enter into a restricted play there, and how their interplay is controlled: discourses of historical writing, sexuality, theatre, cinema, those of the mass media – television, newspapers, radio, magazine advertising, discourses which turn on the family, colonialism, nationalism, among many others.

These concerns are also central to our work in *Camera Obscura*, particularly when the question of conflicting definitions and in-

18 E. Benveniste, 'L'appareil formel de l'énonciation', *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris 1974, p85.

126 terests, the notion that every film is crossed by a heterogeneity of discourses, bears upon the representation of women. The films of Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman and Marguerite Duras, although very different in some ways, are among those made by women who share a motivating interest in the status of the representation of woman – her desire, her self-image, the image others create of and for her. These films have been very helpful in suggesting possible approaches to the question ‘who speaks’ when what is at stake is the woman’s voice/image, particularly in showing the difficulty in asking it: the status of ‘woman’ (daughter, mother, etc) is unstable, which makes attempts to formulate what a ‘woman’s discourse’ might be a tentative but, at the same time, an open question, one which is explored increasingly in women’s films, as well as in feminist theory.

One of the ways this difficulty is brought out is by making the *I* of the enunciation problematic. In *News From Home*, the sound track establishes an *I-you* relationship through a mother’s letters to her daughter, who has left her family in Belgium to make films in New York. This, and everything else we know about the mother or daughter, we know from the letters except for the sound of the voice reading them, which we imagine to be the daughter’s, and the images we see which look almost like photographs in the fixity of their hold upon disconnected scenes, streets and subways in New York, with people randomly present or absent, none of them the *you* addressed in the letters. Another *I-you* relationship, between the subject of the enunciation (the point of view from which the narrative is organised) and the spectator, is caught among several representations: those the mother ceaselessly tries to piece together in the imaginary space of the letters (the family, present as ‘news from home’, the lack in the mother’s life caused by her daughter’s absence, the mother’s attempts to visualise her daughter’s life, to fit it into what she knows, and thus her constant demand for more news, more descriptions, a photograph) and the representations framing the letters – the sound of the woman’s voice reading them, the city noises coming in, interfering with the words, the images.

One is tempted to identify the voice reading the letters with the daughter’s, the visual point of view with hers, and, quickly, to conflate three different terms: the subject of the enunciation (the *I* who speaks, organises the narrative logic), the daughter, and Chantal Akerman, film-maker, who has said that *News From Home* is based on letters her mother sent her when she went to New York to make films. To do this, however, would be to take for granted the very terms the film establishes as difficult, and at best, fragile: both mother and daughter when they attempt to ‘originate’ representations, images, let’s say, of their own desire. As in Rainer’s *Film About a Woman Who . . .* and much of Duras’ work, autobiographical reference serves a complex function, one

which draws on a woman's lived experience while at the same time complicating the question 'who speaks' by dispersing the origin of the enunciation across many positions; the film-maker, like the filmic system and its characters, is shaped by conflicting interests and desires. To understand the positions available to mother or daughter in *News From Home*, one has to take into account the symbolic structures which circumscribe them, just as to understand the options the various women referred to as 'she' see for themselves in *Film About a Woman Who . . .*, as well as the overall logic of the film's manoeuvres, requires an analysis of the different discourses which ultimately determine them. Like research on the cinematic codes, this is a study which goes beyond the individual film. The work of *m/f* is very helpful in demonstrating this, and in *Camera Obscura* n2, Raymond Bellour's analysis of enunciation in *Marnie* shows some of the interests which shaped Hitchcock as 'enunciation' there, extending beyond him and the global text of his films to take in the psychological rules of the functioning of the classical cinematic institution, in particular the importance of the look (of the camera-director-male character/delegate) which controls the fiction through (at the expense of) the desired woman's body. Much of that issue of *Camera Obscura* is about the relationship of the look to the enunciating I.

It is important to ask these questions also of the many kinds of films which make up the New American Cinema, or of avant-garde film more generally. Surely the answers are not foregone conclusions, nor without interest or consequence. For one thing, many of the film-makers in this 'second avant-garde', to use Peter Wollen's phrase, have been very much influenced by experimental film. Within the American avant-garde itself, however, it is interesting to see how film-makers who were once considered paradigm formalists (Snow or Frampton, for example) are now beginning to be reconsidered in terms of fictional and representational strategies which deal more or less explicitly with questions of enunciation. This shift of attention to the entire process of signification, rather than limiting it to the play of the signifiers, will sooner or later necessitate changes in the official view of avant-garde film, and perhaps will also make a re-evaluation of the purposes of avant-garde film criticism seem important.

JANET BERGSTROM

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WIDE ANGLE

VOLUME II, NUMBER 4 ON JOHN FORD

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VOLUME III, NUMBER 1 ON SILENT FILM

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Ideology/Discourse/Institution

Ian Connell

The aim of this SEFT Weekend School was 'to clarify the meanings and the uses of a set of concepts which together define the parameters of SEFT's work', and 'to open up debates and problems necessary for the development of its work in the area of cultural theory and practice'. For the most part, this review will be concerned with the second of these aims. It will not attempt an exhaustive recovery of all the issues and questions that were raised and discussed. It is hoped, however, that those which I address would be counted by the other participants as among the major ones. One such issue, perhaps the main issue of the School, was the conceptualisation of the relation of the textual to the extra-textual. In general terms, what was being posed was the problem of how to think practices of meaning-production historically. How could the relations contracted between the practices of a social formation be conceptualised without evacuating their specificities? How could the structure of a particular conjuncture of practices be thought without resorting to the determinism and essentialism of, for example, 'economism', or the formalism of 'theoreticist' accounts?

In the first session, which was introduced by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, this cluster of issues was raised about the cinema's relation to the state and how this could be understood through an application of certain of Althusser's formulations. These were drawn principally from the first part of his tentative essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', (in *Lenin and Philosophy*, London 1971). Though this essay is by now probably familiar to many, it is worth recalling, at least in outline, its main features. The essay attempts a reformulation of the classic theory of the superstructure and of the state. The base/superstructure metaphor is said to have theoretical limits. While it serves to highlight the problem of *determination* – the complex and hierarchical character of the marxist conception of social formations, the determination in the last in-

stance by the base (specific modes of material production) and the relative autonomy of the superstructures – it has not led to any development of our understanding of the specific determinations exercised by the superstructural practices. Althusser argues that distinct indices of effectivity have to be accounted for, and that this must be thought through from the point of view of reproduction. (It should be noted that in his use of the concept of reproduction, Althusser is not re-calling those positions which regard the superstructures as mere epiphenomena of the base). The state is argued to be a more complex reality than the definition of it given by the – now institutionalised – ‘marxist theory of the state’. While this complexity has been implicitly recognised in political practice – the struggle to seize and conserve the power to fashion and to use the apparatuses of the state – no corresponding theory has been expressed. He suggests that the distinction drawn between state power and state apparatus must be supplemented by another – the distinction between *Repressive State Apparatuses* (RSAs) and *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISAs). This is a distinction made in terms of the predominant mode of operation of particular apparatuses. The problematic of ideology is closely linked (in Althusser’s essay) to the problematic of power and class domination. He argues, for example, that ‘no class can hold state power over a long period of time without at the same time, exercising its hegemony over and in the ISAs’, and that the ISAs ‘represent the form in which the ideology of the ruling class must necessarily be realised’.

Elsewhere, in the same tradition of thought, and especially in the work of Poulantzas, the state as a complex of repressive and ideological apparatuses is conceived as the material condensation of the relations of force between classes. One of the key points emphasised by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s presentation was that the material framework of the state – the apparatuses – is not neutral; political domination and struggle is engraved on it. The state is, therefore, not above or prior to class struggle. Nor is it simply the instrument of domination of the economically dominant fraction of capital at a particular moment. It is rather the site of specific contradictions between the fundamental classes. It is a condensation of these contradictions between the fractions of the power bloc as well as between the power bloc and the dominated classes and fractions. Nevertheless, the state remains, as Poulantzas insists, unambiguously bourgeois. It operates to organise and reproduce the hegemony of *all* the fractions of capital, to give them a political unity and at the same time to disorganise dominated classes as classes.

The discussion of this framework, briefly outlined here, was carried out in the weekend school in terms of the problems associated with designating the cinema an Ideological State Apparatus. In a

positive way, the Althusserian contribution emphasised the necessity of understanding how the economic, the juridico-political and the ideological were articulated together. The juridico-political discourse about broadcasting and the cinema, and the state's limited economic intervention could be seen to have 'pertinent effects' with respect to their practices. For example, the state's actions *vis-à-vis* broadcasting and the cinema have contributed to their establishment as what have been called 'national' institutions, vehicles for the enunciation of a 'national way of life', important factors 'in the education of all classes of the community in the spread of a "national" culture'. Many of the reservations about designating the cinema in this way stemmed from the instrumentalist and functionalist tendencies to be found particularly in the first part of the ISA's essay. Despite the acknowledgement of struggle within the apparatuses of the state, this is, in the ISA's essay, little more than gestural. The overriding thrust of the argument is to view the ISAs as unproblematically reproducing the social relations of production. The formulations cannot accommodate the existence of oppositions and contradictions which exist between the various sectors of the state. Moreover, the ideological practices of the ISAs are still conceived of in a manner which appears to forget that they are shot through with contradictions. Simply stated, the main formulations of that essay still support the view that the ISAs do, always and unproblematically, secure their imaginary coherences.

These problems were raised again in a somewhat different way in the course of the second and third sessions (introduced by Colin McCabe* and Paul Willemen respectively) especially in the latter which was based on Paul Willemen's article 'Notes on Subjectivity' (*Screen*, v19 n1, Spring 1978). Here again, the major questions had to do with the articulation of the discursive with the extra-discursive, and with how to adequately grasp in thought the insertion of texts in history. The point of departure into these questions was given in Paul Willemen's critical estimation of formalist readings/interpretations of texts of the proposition, central to such readings, that 'texts construct spectators, with all its implications of subjugation, unilateral determination, not to say terrorism'. Partly at issue here was the a-historical conception of subjectivity. Readers/spectators are presumed to be positioned through formal mechanisms as such; they are merely the effects of these mechanisms. Texts are conceived of as 'autonomous, self-regulating and self-enclosed systems', as 'outside ideology, outside social formations and outside history'. As texts also inscribe readers, they, the readers, are also set apart from history and from ideology. Some instances of 'troubled' formalism have ad-

* An article based on his contribution will be published in a subsequent issue of *Screen*.

- 132 mitted that the reading/interpretation of texts will be determined by sets of discourses other than those activated by the text. These influences have been conceived of, however, as 'extraneous interferences', as 'socially produced noise' to be systematically studied, of course, but only in order that they can be stripped away in the interests of generalising a 'correct' reading of the text(s).

With respect to this conception of reading practices, Willemen's argument was that 'real readers' never confront texts in the abstract. They are always, and at all times, 'subjects in history, living in given social formations, rather than mere subjects of a single text'. Individuals are in Laclau's terms, 'the bearers and points of intersection of an accumulation of contradictions'. For Willemen they are constructed by and intend meaning within a plurality of discourses. They have different, and contradictory, relations to sets of discourses, relations which are, in part, determined by their already given positioning within 'the real' (that is, within the fundamental relations of production). The individual's passage through institutionalised 'reality' also exercises determinations upon which discursive formations will be encountered. In educational institutions, for example, while some discourses will be preferred, others will be 'marginalised or declared out of bounds'. But, as Willemen also points out this control is never absolute in that 'unpredicted discourses will always threaten that control'.

The main point to be emphasised here is that any text is read 'unpredictably' – that is, any text can be 'pulled into more or less any ideological space, they can be mobilised for diverse and even contradictory critical projects'. How this is accomplished can, in part, be understood by attention to the influence of those 'other' discursive formations and practices to which particular classes of readers have access and which position them as particular kinds of subjects. The direction of the argument also requires a reconception of texts as consisting of a bundle of discourses, each 'discourse installing its subject of enunciation'. Although any text will, necessarily, produce a 'series of subject positions' this plurality will be structured-in-dominance to use the Althusserian phrase. These subject-forms can be and are mapped onto each other; signifying practices always work with a plurality of discourses, and 'a given practice always includes at least one discourse about the interrelation of discourses, about the way in which various subjects of enunciation relate to each other'. On the basis of the argument outlined here, texts 'can restrict readings (offer resistances), they can't determine them'. Texts can never propose absolute closures, they can only propose a certain structure of discourses, cementing them together in imaginary coherences, which, nevertheless, remain open to the negotiations of historically situated readers. The force of Willemen's argument

in this respect is to suggest that there can never be an immediate nor direct correspondence between the 'two poles' in any practice of meaning production. Any reading is never simply consumptive, a mere adoption of the subject-forms mapped out by the formal operations of a text. Any reading is also, and always, interrogative. In short, the reading of a text is, at all times, a practice of 'expanded reproduction' (Marx), a re-construction of the text in and through extra-textual discursive formations.

In the course of the discussion of Willemen's contribution, it was suggested that it opened the way to voluntarism, to the admission of the indeterminate play of individual wills. However, the argument appeared to be suggesting that the occurrences of differential readings was not so much a product of free will, as an effect of the contradictions within and between distinct discursive formations. Nevertheless, the wilful or the intentional must still be accounted for, if we are to avoid resorting to a crude Althusserianism by advocating some notion that individuals are caught within structures and simply produced by them. This would entail a conceptual shift of gear. It would require, as well as continuing to demonstrate that 'reality' is an effect or construct, attending to, and producing knowledge of, the ways in which the real as 'reality' or the lived-in world is not only lived, but acted upon. This is not just an important theoretical point, it is also an important political one. In his critique of the classical tradition's conception of ideology, it is worth remembering that Althusser did not merely insist that ideology was profoundly 'unconscious'. Echoing Marx, he also argued that,

it is in ideology (as the locus of political struggle) that men [sic] *become conscious* of their place in the world and in history, it is within this ideological unconsciousness that men *succeed in altering the lived relation between them and the world* and acquiring that new form of specific unconsciousness called 'consciousness'.

The point is, then, that the 'altering of the lived relation' has also to be understood and participated in. To acknowledge the already constructed individual 'endowed with consciousness and a will' (Marx: *Grundrisse*), to acknowledge that people 'make history', and, moreover, to acknowledge the necessity of making history anew is only voluntaristic to the extent that in so doing the determinate conditions, the complex 'circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' are ignored.

The productivity of this weekend school can be suggested in a number of ways. There was a marked emphasis on engaging in conjunctural analysis, that is, on producing knowledge of how the ideological-cinematic, the political and the economic are combined together in particular instances. We have noted the observation that any text is composed of a bundle of discourses and that

134 reference to the formal mechanisms of the text is, in itself, insufficient to explain how that bundle is structured. A conjunctural analysis would, in this respect, attempt to decipher the effects of the political, for example, in terms of the discourses which are included, those which are excluded or subordinated. It was also observed that films/texts can be mobilised for diverse and even contradictory projects without denying the capacity of the text/film itself to constrain these projects. To develop these observations it would be necessary to look again to the ways in which texts are inserted within a particular apparatus, within a system of consumption, distribution or exchange specific to a particular society and a particular historical moment. As I have already attempted to indicate, the circulation and consumption of texts is always the site of an encounter, an encounter, in the first instance, of distinct discursive formations. The above observations point us to a study of texts as they exist in these encounters. There is one final point which I should like to emphasise. The force of Willemen's argument in particular is to direct attention to the level of social connotations, and to the practices of symbolisation in and through which they are fashioned. The scope of a discourse is not encompassed by an analysis which refers only to its mode of address. Any discourse is always *about* an already constituted and contradictory reality. Discourse, by itself, does not constitute reality, which, as has already been indicated, is also an effect of political and economic practices. The point is that this reality is grasped, made to mean, in different ways by different discourses. To attend to the level of social connotations is, then, to attend to the encounter of, and struggle between, particular ideologies.

Recent British Film Institute Television Monographs*

Colin MacCabe

These two monographs continue the British Film Institute's commitment to a series which endeavours to understand the functioning of television both as institution and as practice: the political and ideological constraints under which television is produced and the political and ideological constraints that television produces. Both of these publications are written from a historical materialist perspective and both are crucially informed by the Althusserian concept of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA): 'While all of Althusser's work is relevant to the question of ideology, the key essay for the purposes of this monograph is 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' (McArthur p2); 'Underlying this collection is the assumption that television does function broadly as an Ideological Apparatus in much the sense that Althusser has proposed' (Caughie p1). Many of the mutual strengths and weaknesses of these two monographs are the direct result of their reliance on the notoriously difficult concept of the ISA. But if the overall theoretical framework is similar, their particular projects are very different.

McArthur has produced a closely argued essay which deals with one very carefully delimited area of television while Caughie has collected a variety of articles, some of which theorise television in the most general terms and some of which provide empirical information on various international aspects of the institution. McArthur opens his argument with definitions of bourgeois history and the dominant practice of television and then examines how these two are variously articulated in factual

* Colin McArthur, *Television and History*, BFI Television Monograph n8, British Film Institute 1978. John Caughie Ed, *Television: Ideology and Exchange*, BFI Television Monograph n9, British Film Institute 1978.

136 and fictional historical programmes (named tele-history and television historical drama respectively). Bourgeois history is defined in terms of an empiricist epistemology, an account of causality which awards primacy to the actions of individuals, and a teleological understanding of historical time (which understanding presupposes that historical time is homogenous). Against this is posed a marxist history which, breaking with empiricism, constructs a series of concepts (class, mode of production, etc) with which to handle historical material. These concepts displace the individual across a series of conflicts in which he or she is contradictorily constituted and, further, allow for an understanding of historical time as heterogenous (thus enabling it to be conceptualised in a non-teleological manner). McArthur then demonstrates that empiricist epistemology and the primacy of the individual also dominate the practice of television and it is these assumptions that lie behind many of the 'self-evident' features of 'good' television. It is this similarity of premisses that allows bourgeois history and tele-history to co-exist so happily. McArthur analyses how the primacy accorded to the individual determines the structure of both factual and fictional programmes and indicates how the relations between narrative voice and image in tele-history are at the service of an empiricism which would render what appears on the screens as evident and finished, ready for the viewer passively to consume. It might be asked how one can account for the similarity of two such disparate practices and it is in this context that Althusser's formulations are important because, throughout the monograph, the unity of ideological production is understood in terms of its function: to reproduce the existing relations of production. It is the maintenance of the existing social formation that guarantees the coincidences that the text insists on, as the opening of the concluding chapter makes clear:

'The preceding chapters have sought to demonstrate that the dominant practices of history-writing and television production (both individually and in mutually reinforcing ways) allow free passage to philosophical categories and aesthetic structures congenial to the maintenance of the system of social relations of advanced capitalism. In so doing, these dominant practices suppress, push to the margins, allow only limited currency to, alternative philosophical and aesthetic structures which are ungenial to that system' (p47).

Throughout McArthur's argument it is British television which provides the constant focus of attention but the *Ideology and Exchange* collection considers television in its international dimension. It contains seven articles which cover a variety of theoretical and empirical problems, and it is the empirical studies which are much the most valuable. The account of the technological and editorial factors in the transmission of pictures from Saigon during the Tet offensive provides a fascinating example of the imbrica-

tion of technology, aesthetics and politics which informs the production of television news in the United States. The article which deals with the history of television in Chile raises fundamental questions about the relation between the dominant practices of television and the political form of bourgeois democracy. Perhaps the most informative of all these empirical studies is an analysis of the international market in television programmes (an article which incidentally demonstrates the considerable amount of British television sold abroad).

But to transform these articles from fascinating anecdote into ideological analysis would require a set of concepts able to do justice to the specificity of the medium. The hasty borrowing of concepts from sociology or communications theory only emphasises the lack of any general understanding of the functioning of television. Nor is this theoretical need satisfied by the two theoretical articles included in the collection. The opening article by Armand Mattelart, a Belgian sociologist working in South America, attempts a general characterisation of the nature of bourgeois and imperialist communication. This characterisation is almost wholly dependent on Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. In *Capital*, Marx argues that one of the features of commodity production is that agents engaged in the process of production necessarily (from their position in the process) misconceive the nature of that production and their place within it. Such an argument, which locates the structure of ideas within the pre-given structure of reality merely reverses the traditional subject-object relation and refuses to grant any effectivity (materiality) to the ideological practices which produce ideological positions. Instead of an analysis of these practices, and the possibility of intervention within them, the practices are simply seen as the reflection of economic relations. Mattelart's article is particularly theoretically confused as later in the course of his exposition he quotes from arguments of Althusser's which undermine the idealist basis of the theory of fetishism. Mattelart's position is, however, that of the classic economic reductionist and the weaknesses of such a position are made clear when he talks of the difficulty of producing 'subversive messages' within the existing system of television when 'the latent structures out of which the message is built and which give it meaning reflect the underlying structures of the system which it seeks to challenge' (p11 my emphasis). The theoretical difficulty of this position is that although it locates all the determinations on the practices of television outside television itself, it can give no account of the effectivity of these determinations except through an account of the consciousness of the agents caught up in commodity production. As this account of consciousness is so general, the specific practices of television become inexplicable epiphenomena. It is no accident that such a theoretical position can go hand in hand with a notion of meaning and message which remain

138 uninterrogated. The effects of this theoretical strategy are a political and ideological quietism in which a change in economic relations must necessarily precede any other transformations.¹

If Mattelart quotes Althusser in order to make an economically reductionist position 'more materialist', the second theoretical article (an abridged version of a study of French television by the Lu Xun group for ideological intervention, first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*) interprets Althusser in an politically reductionist fashion, a reduction principally determined by the maoist political affiliations of the authors. If Mattelart's argument reeks of an academic and rhetorical marxism in which the categories of idealist philosophy obviate the need for any detailed analysis of practices, the *Cahiers* article produces an extremely rich and valuable account of the functioning of a French current affairs programme, but an account which is marred by the assumption of an unargued primacy of the political.

The account of the structure and operation of the programme and the way in which it articulates codes specific to television and film at the service of bourgeois political ideology provides a welcome attention to the specificity of television but this attention is constantly negated by a political reductionism which understands the state and all its ideological apparatuses as an *instrument* for class domination. If Mattelart draws on an established marxist tradition which understands the State and its apparatuses as *reflections* of an economic base, the *Cahiers* article draws on an equally venerable tradition which understands the state as an *instrument* of class rule.² The traditional difficulty with such an analysis is that, like the economist reduction, it constitutes the determinations on the ISA outside its own practices. But whereas the economist version assigns the effectivity of the determinations to a theory of consciousness, the political version relies on a theory which assumes that the bourgeoisie's hold of state power necessarily entails that it can dominate the ISA's in unproblematic fashion.

The Lu Xun group's assumption of the bourgeoisie as agent within the ideological state apparatus of television makes a nonsense of the major distinction that the concept of ISA was designed to operate. In his article, Althusser makes the classic distinction between state power, held by a definite class or alliance of classes, and the State Apparatuses, where the balance of class forces may

1 The theoretical link between commodity fetishism and a quietist politics does not of course entail that in practice the two will go together. To commit oneself to the theory of commodity fetishism does, however, remove any active relation between theory and politics.

2 cf Bob Jessop 'Marx and Engels on the State' in *Politics, Ideology and the State: Papers from the Communist University of London* ed Sally Hibbin pp40-68 and 'Recent theories of the capitalist state' in *Cambridge Journal of Economics* v1 n4, pp353-373.

140 claims are contradictory. Insofar as the unity of the ISAs is determined by ruling class ideology and insofar as that ideology is understood in terms of the class interest it represents then there is no autonomy of the ideological, however relative. The claims for autonomy collapse under the pressure of functional explanations, a process which is clearly demonstrated in the following passage:

' However, relatively autonomous as the institution television is, the argument of this monograph thus far has been that *superstructural* activity such as the writing of history and the production of television programmes are not in the last analysis diverse, wholly autonomous and unconnected activities but take their character from the system of production relationships in the social formation they inhabit. To be sure, the activities of history-writing and television production (and every other *superstructural* activity) evolve their own particular *practices* which mask their relationship with each other and with the economic base, but since the central function of superstructural activity is the operation of *ideology*, the most important question to be asked of any *practice* is whether it is congenial or uncongenial to the maintenance of the existing relations of production in our society.' (McArthur p15).

This argument indicates how the theoretical presuppositions of Althusser's theory of ideology lead straight back to the economism with which it originally intended to break, and it is such a reductionist analysis that McArthur, for all his incidental subtlety and interest, provides. The monograph starts with the assumption that ruling class ideology is unified by certain crucial ideas (the centrality of the individual, the primacy of empirical evidence) and that these ideas are determined by bourgeois economic relations. Inevitably, and despite its explicit statements, the text then understands history-writing and tele-history as nothing more than the forms for the expression of an already defined content, forms which lack an effectivity of their own. It is these theoretical assumptions the lead McArthur to a definition of bourgeois history which ignores the institutional sites of its discourses (primary, secondary and tertiary education) and to an understanding of tele-history which fails to consider how the practices of television cut across and displace the assumptions of history-writing. To consider the relations between television and history, it would be necessary to analyse the different audiences that the two practices address and the different relations of production within the practices. Such a study would not define the communications and education ISAs in terms of a pre-given function but in terms of their differing conditions of existence. These conditions would include the functions assigned them by the laws and regulations under which they operate and their articulation with more general relations of production but no theoretical primacy would

be awarded to such conditions.

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An analysis of this type would have the advantage of indicating the particular areas of political struggle within specific institutions. Because tele-history is theorised at the level of expressive form, the concluding chapter on alternatives becomes a plea for a form 'adequate' to marxist history. This reductionist position ignores the possibility of television investigating the assumptions of bourgeois or marxist history in terms of its own practices (one might think here of Rossellini's historical work for television, or, more immediately relevant for British history, one might consider the example of Phil Mulloy's film *In the Forest* in which the articulation of images is in no way exhausted by the reductionism of the traditional marxist history recited by the commentator). Such examples, however, raise the further question, absent from McArthur's work, as to how the organisation of television within this country effectively prevents the production of any such programmes. It is significant, from this perspective, that the one programme for which McArthur has unequivocal praise (the television adaptation of the 7:84 Theatre Company's play *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*) has, in television's terms, a most unusual production history.

Finally, the major criticism of McArthur's considerable achievement is that it fails in the political aim that it sets itself. This failure is doubly determined. I have already suggested that the theoretical assumptions lead to a neglect of the specificity and effectivity of television which means that the political struggle is transposed outside the practices and structures of television. The monograph thus becomes a simple appeal to individual workers in television to find the appropriate forms for a content defined elsewhere. This appeal, however, assumes *political* conditions which do not exist: it assumes the monograph has a politically coherent audience. This assumption is set out in the dedication 'To all television workers - makers, critics and teachers - seeking alternative forms . . .'. The unfortunate reality is that there is no organisation or journal which organises or addresses the three activities which McArthur wishes to place together. This monograph (and less explicitly the whole monograph series) presumes an area of intervention which is as yet non-existent. Perhaps the BFI might supplement its commitment to publishing work on television by considering how such an arena might be constituted. It should go without saying that this problem is even more pertinent for SEFT and its magazines.